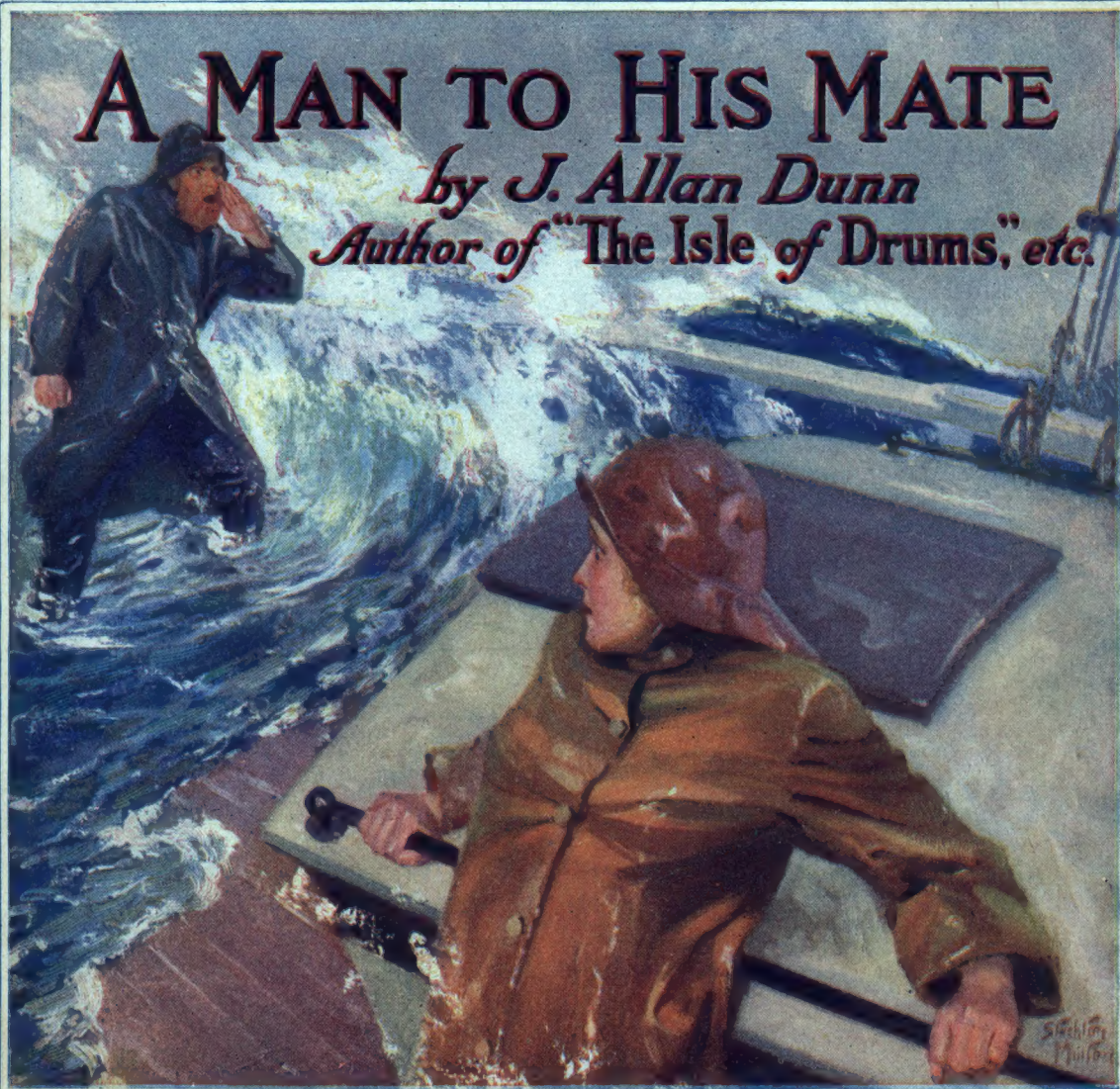


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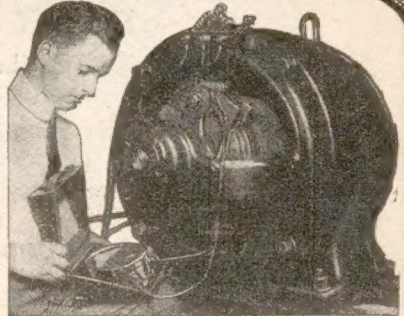
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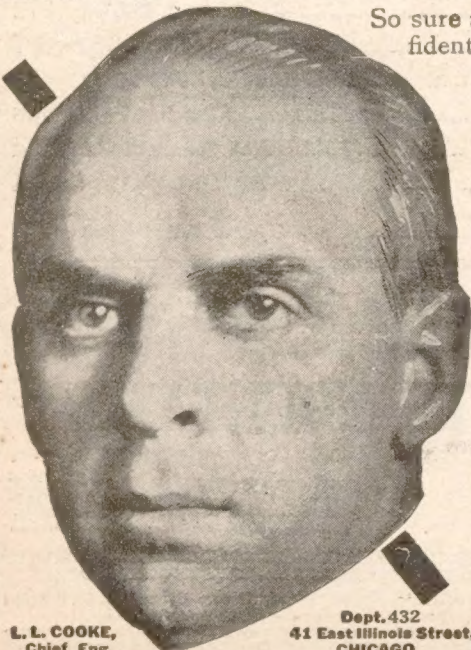
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ISSUED WEEKLY

NUMBER 3

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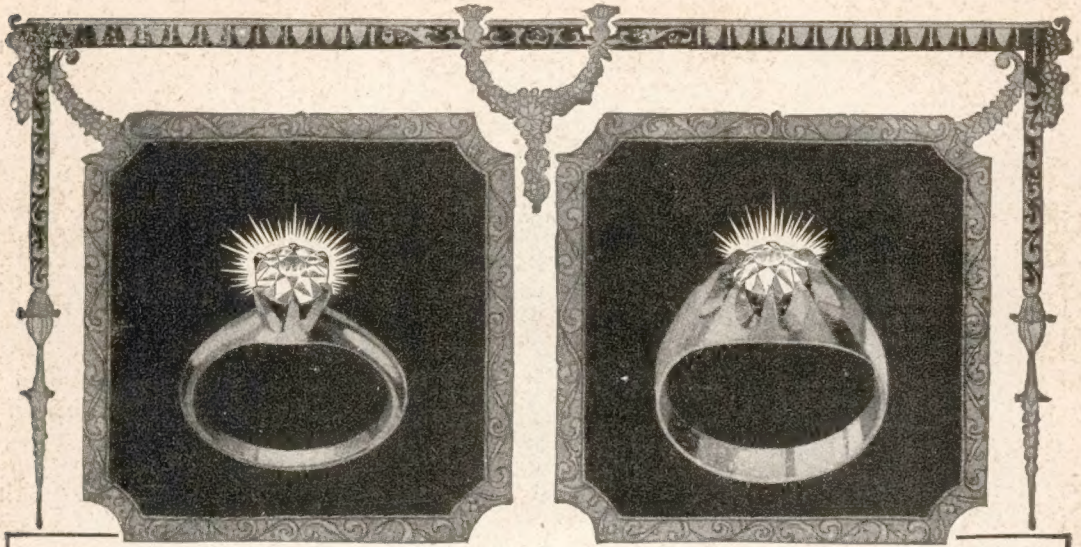
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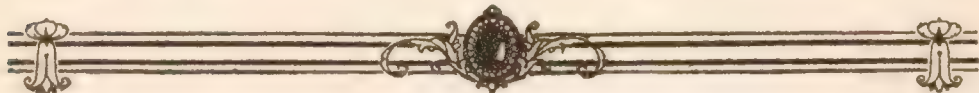
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A Man to His Mate

by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "Isle of Drums," "The Butterfly Orchid," etc.

CHAPTER I.

BLIND SAMSON.

IT was perfect weather along the San Francisco water-front, and Rainey reacted to the brisk touch of the trade-wind upon his cheek, the breeze tempering the sun, bringing with it a tang of the open sea and a hint of Oriental spices from the wharves. He whistled as he went, watching a lumber coaster outward bound. The dull thump of a heavy cane upon the timbered walk and the shuffle of uncertain feet warned him from blundering into a man tapping his way along the Embarcadero, a giant who halted abruptly and faced him, leaning on the heavy stick.

"Matey," asked the giant, "could you put a blind man in the way of finding the sealin' schooner Karluk?"

The voice fitted its owner, Rainey thought—a deep voice tempered to the occasion, a deep-sea voice that could bellow above the roar of a gale if needed. For all his shoregoing clothes and shuffle, the man was certainly a sailor, or had been. All the skin uncovered by cloth or hair was weath-

ered to leather, the great hands curled in as if they clutched an invisible rope. He wore dark glasses with side lenses, over which heavy brows projected in shaggy wisps of red hair.

Blind as the man proclaimed himself with voice and action, Rainey sensed something back of those colored glasses that seemed to be appraising him, almost as if the will of the man was peering, or listening, focused through those listless sockets. A kind of magnetism, not at all attractive, Rainey decided, even as he offered help and information.

"You're not fifty yards from the Karluk," Rainey replied. "But you're bound in the wrong direction. Let me put you right. I'm going that way myself."

"That's kind of ye, matey," said the other. "But I picked ye for that sort, hearin' you whistlin' as you came swingin' along. Light-hearted, I thinks, an' young, most likely; he'll help a stranded man. Give me the touch of yore arm, matey, an' I'll stow this spar of mine."

He swung about, slinging the curving handle of the stick over his right elbow

as the fingers of his left hand placed themselves on Rainey's proffered arm. Strong fingers, almost vibrant with a force manifest through serge and linen. Fingers that could grip like steel upon occasion.

Rainey wonderingly sized up his consort. The stranger's bulk was enormous. Rainey was well over the average himself, but he was only a stripling beside this hulk, this stranded hulk, of manhood. And, for all the spectacled eyes and shuffling feet, there was a stamp of coordinated strength about the giant that bespoke the blind Samson. Given eyes, Rainey could imagine him agile as a panther, strong as a bear.

His weight was made up of the thews and sinews, spare and solid flesh without an ounce of waste, upon a mighty skeleton. His face was heavy-bearded in hair of flaming, curling red, from high cheekbones down out of sight below the soft, loose collar of his shirt. The bridge of his glasses rested on the outcurve of a nose like the beak of an osprey, the ends of the wires looped about ears that lay close to the head, hairy all about the curves, lobeless, the tips suggesting the ear-tips of a satyr.

Mouth and jaw were hidden, but the beard could not deny the bold projection of the latter. About thirty, Rainey judged him. Buffeted by time and weather, but in the prime of his strength.

"Snow-blinded, matey," said the man. "North o' Point Barrow, a year an' more ago. Brought me up all standin'. What are you? Steamer man? Purser, maybe?"

"Newspaperman," answered Rainey. "Water-front detail. For the *Times*."

"You don't say so, matey? A writer, eh?"

Again Rainey felt the tug of that something back of the dark lenses, some speculation going on in the man's mind concerning him. And he felt the firm fingers contract ever so slightly, sinking into the muscles of his forearm for a second with a hint of how they could bruise and paralyze at will. Once more a faint sense of revulsion fought with his natural inclination to aid the handicapped mariner, and he shook it off.

"The Karluk sails to-morrow," he said. "Aye, so—so they told me, matey. You've bin aboard?"

"I had a short talk with Captain Simms when she docked. Not much of a yarn. She didn't have a good trip, you know."

"Why, I didn't know. But—hold hard a minnit, will ye? You see, Simms is an old shipmate of mine. He don't dream I'm within a hundred miles o' here. Aye, or a thousand." He gave a deep-chested chuckle. "Now, then, matey, look here."

Rainey was anchored by the compelling grip. They stood next to the slip in which the sealer lay. The Karluk's decks were deserted, though there was smoke coming from the galley stovepipe.

"Simms is likely to be aboard," went on the other. "Ye see, I know his ways. An' I've come a long trip to see him. Nigh to missed him. Only got in from Seattle this mornin'. He ain't expectin' me, an' it's in my mind to surprise him. By way of a joke. I don't want to be announced, ye see. Just drop in on him. How's the deck? Clear?"

"No one in sight," said Rainey.

"Fine! Mates an' crew down the Barb'ry Coast, I reckon. Sealers have liberties last shore-day. Like whalers. I've buried a few irons myself, matey, but I'll never sight the vapor of a right whale agin. Stranded, I am. So you'll do me a favor, matey, an' pilot me down into the cabin, if so be the skipper's there. If he ain't, I'll wait for him. I've got the right an' run o' the Karluk's cabin. I know ev'ry inch of her. You'll see when we go aboard. Let's go."

Rainey led him down the gangway to the deck of the sealer, still cluttered a bit with unstowed gear. Once on board, the blind man seemed to walk with assurance, guiding himself with touches here and there that showed his familiarity with the vessel's rig. And he no longer shuffled, but walked lightly, grinning at Rainey through his beard, with one blunt forefinger set to his mouth as he approached the cabin skylight, lifted on the port side. Through it came the murmur of voices. The blind man nodded in satisfaction and widened his grin with a "Hush!" to his guide.

"We'll fool 'em proper," he lippered rather than uttered.

The companion doors were closed, but they opened noiselessly. The stairs were carpeted with corrugated rubber that muffled all sound. Two men sat at the cabin table, leaning forward, hands and forearms outstretched, fingering something. One Rainey recognized as the captain, Simms—a heavy, square-built man, gray-haired, clean-shaven, his flesh tanned, yet somehow unhealthy, as if the bronze was close to tarnishing. There were deep puffs under the gray, tired eyes.

The other was younger, tall, nervously active, with dark eyes and a dark mustache and beard, the latter trimmed to a Vandyke. Between them was a long, slim sack of leather, a miner's poke. It was half full of something that stuffed its lower extremity solid, without doubt the same substance that glistened in the mouth of the sack and the palms of the two men—gold—coarse dust of gold!

Rainey felt himself thrust to one side as the blind man straddled across the bottom of the companionway, towering in the cabin while he thrust his stick with a thump on the floor and thundered, in a bellow that seemed to fill the place and come tumbling back in deafening echo:

"Karluk ahoy!"

The face of Captain Simms paled, the tan turned to a sickly gray, and his jaw dropped. Rainey saw fear come into his eyes. His companion did not stir a muscle except for the quick shift of his glance, but went on sitting at the table, the gold in one palm, the fingers of his other hand resting on the grains.

"Jim Lund!" gasped the captain hoarsely.

"That's me, you skulking sculpin! Thought I was bear meat by this, didn't ye, blast your rotten soul to hell! But I'm back, Bill Simms. Back, an' this time you don't slip me!"

Jim Lund's face was purple red with rage, great veins standing out upon it so swollen that it seemed they must surely burst and discharge their congested contents. Out of the purpling flesh his scarlet hair curled in diabolical effect. His teeth

gleamed through his beard, strong, yellow, far apart. He looked, Rainey thought, like a blind Berserker, restrained only by his affliction.

"You left me blind on the floe, Bill Simms!" he roared. "Blind, in a drivin' blizzard with the ice breakin' up! If I didn't have use for yore carcass I'd twist yore head from yore scaly body like I'd pull up a carrot."

Lund's fingers opened and closed convulsively. Before Rainey the vision of the threatened crime rose clear.

"I looked for you, Jim," pleaded the captain, and to Rainey his words lacked conviction. "I didn't know you were blind. I heard you shout just before the blizzard broke loose."

Lund answered with an inarticulate roar.

"And there's others present, Jim. I can explain it to you when we're by ourselves. When you're a mite calmer, Jim."

Lund banged his stick down on the table with a smashing blow that made the man with the Vandyke beard, still silent, keenly observant, draw back his arm with a catlike swiftness that only just evaded the stroke. The heavy wood landed fairly on the filled half of the poke and caused some of the gold to leap out of the mouth.

"What's that I hit?" asked Lund. "Soft, like a rat." He lunged forward, felt for the poke, and found it, lifted it, hefted it, his forehead puckered with deep seams, discovered the open end, poured out some of the colors on one palm, and used that for a mortar, grinding at the grains with his finger for a pestle, still weighing the stuff with a slight up-and-down movement of his hand.

He nodded as he slipped the poke into a side pocket, and the cabin grew very silent. Lund's face was grimly terrible. Rainey could have gone when the blind man reached for the gold and left the ladder clear. He had meant to at the first opportunity, but now he was held fascinated by what was about to happen, and Lund stepped back across the companionway again.

"So," said Lund, his deep voice muffled by some swift restraint. "You found it.

And you're going back after more?" His forehead was still creased with puzzlement. "Wal, I'm bein' with ye, eyes or no eyes, an' I'll keep tabs on ye, Bill Simms, by day and night. You can lay to that, you slimy-hearted swab!"

His voice had risen again. Rainey saw the sweat standing out on the captain's forehead as he answered:

"Of course you'll come, Jim. No need for you to talk this way."

"No need to talk! By the eternal, what I've got to say's bin steamin' in me for fourteen months o' blackness, an' it's comin' out, now it's started! Who's this man, who was talkin' with ye when I come aboard?"

He wheeled directly toward the man with the Vandyke, who still sat motionless, apparently calm, looking on as if at a play that might turn out to be either comedy or tragedy.

"That's Dr. Carlsen. He's to be surgeon this trip, Jim," said Simms deprecatingly, though he darted a look at Rainey half suspicious, half resentful. Rainey, on the hint, turned toward the ladder quietly enough, but Lund had nipped him by the biceps before Rainey had taken a step.

"You'll stay right here," said Lund, "while I tell you an' this Doc Carlsen what kind of a man Simms is, with his poke full of gold and me with the price of my last meal spent two hours ago. I won't spin out the yarn.

"I rescued an Aleut off a bit of a berg one time. There warn't much of him left to rescue. Hands an' feet an' nose was frozen so he lost 'em, but the pore devil was grateful, an' he told me something. Told about an island north of Bering Strait, west of Kotzebue Sound, where there was gold on the beach richer and thicker than it ever lay at Nome. I makes for it, gits close enough for my Aleut to recognize it—it ain't an easy place to forget for one who has eyes—an' then we're blown south, an' we git into ice an' trouble. The Aleut dies, an' I lose my ship. But I bin close enough to git the reckonin' of that island.

"Finally I land at Seattle, broke. I meet up with the man called Hard Luck Simms. Also they called him Honest Simms

those days. Some said his honesty accounted for his hard luck. I like him, an' I finally tell him about my island. I put up the reckonin'; an' he supplies the Karluck, grub, an' crew.

"Simms's luck is still agin him. The Karluk gits into ice, gits nipped an' carried north, 'way north, with wind an' current, frozen tight in a floe. It looks like we've got to winter there. Mind ye, I've given Honest Simms the reckonin' of the island. We go out on the ice after bear, though the weather's threatenin', for we're short of meat. An' we kill a Kadiak bear. Me—I'll never stand for the shootin' of another bear if I can stop it.

"I've bin havin' trouble with my eyes. Right along. I'm on the floe not eighty yards from Simms. No, not sixty! It was me killed the bear, an' we're goin' back to the schooner for a sled. I stayed behind to bleed the brute. All of a sudden, like it always hits you, snow-blindness gits me, an' I shouts to Honest Simms. I'm blind, with my eyeballs on fire, an' the fire burnin' back inter my brain.

"Along comes a Point Arrow blister. That's a gale that breeds an' bursts of a second out of nowhere. It gathers up all the loose snow an' ice crystals an' drives 'em in a whirlwind. Presently the wind starts the ice to buckin' an' tremblin' like a jelly under you, splitting inter lanes. You lose your direction even when you got eyes. I'm left in it by that bilge-blooded skunk, blind on the rockin', breakin' floe, while he scuds back to the schooner with his men. That's Honest Simms! Jim Lund's left behind, but Honest Simms has the position of the island."

"I didn't hear you call out you were blind, Lund. The wind blew your words away. I didn't know but what you were as right as the rest of us. The gale shut us all out from each other. We found the schooner by sheer luck before we perished. We looked for you—but the floe was broken up. We looked—"

"Shut up!" bellowed Lund. "You sailed inside of twenty-four hours, Honest Simms. The natives told me so later, when I could understand talk agin. D'ye know what saved me? The bear! I stumbled over the

carcass when I was nigh spent. I ripped it up and clawed some of the warm guts, an' climbed inside the bloody body an' stayed there till it got cold an' clamped down over me. Waitin' for you to come an' git me, Honest Simms!

"That bear was bed and board to me until the natives found it, an' me in it, more dead than alive. Never mind the rest of it. I get here the day before you start back for more gold.

"An' I'm goin' with you. But first I'm goin' to have a full an' fair accountin' o' what you got already. I've got this young chap with me, an' he'll give me a hand to'ard a square deal."

Lund propelled Rainey forward a few steps and then loosened his grip. The captain of the *Karluk* appealed to him directly.

"You're with the *Times*," he said. All the while he talked Rainey was conscious of the gaze of Dr. Carlsen, whose dark eyes appeared to be mocking the whole proceedings, looking on with the air of a man watching card play with a prevision of how the game will come out.

"Mr. Lund is unstrung," said the captain. "He is under the delusion that we deliberately deserted him and, later, found the gold he speaks of. The first charge is nonsense. We did all that was possible in the frightful weather. We barely saved the ship.

"As for the gold, we touched on the island, and we did some prospecting, a very little, before we were driven offshore. The dust in the poke is all we secured. We are going back for more, quite naturally. I can prove all this to you by the log. It is manifestly not doctored, for we imagined Mr. Lund dead. If we had been able to work the beach thoroughly, nothing would tempt me into going back again to add to even a moderate fortune."

Lund had been standing with his great head thrust forward as if concentrating all his remaining senses in an attempt to judge the captain's talk. The doctor sat with one leg crossed, smoking a cigarette, his expression sardonic, sphinxlike. To Rainey, a little bewildered at being dragged into the affair, and annoyed at it, Captain

Simms's words rang true enough. He did not know what to say, whether to speak at all. Lund supplied the gap.

"If that ain't the truth, you lie well, Simms," he said. "But I don't trust ye. You lie when you say you didn't hear me call out I was blind. Sixty yards away, I was, an' the wind hadn't started. I was afraid—yes, afraid—an' I yelled at the top of my lungs. An' you sailed off inside of twenty-four hours."

"Driven off."

"I don't believe ye. You deserted me—left me blind, tucked in the bloody, freezing carcass of a bear. Left me like the cur you are. Why, you—"

The rising frenzy of Lund's voice was suddenly broken by the clear note of a girl. One of two doors in the after-end of the main cabin had opened, and a girl stood in the gap, slim, yellow-haired, with gray eyes that blazed as they looked on the little tableau.

"Who says my father is a cur?" she demanded. "You?" And she faced Lund with such intrepid challenge in her voice, such stinging contempt, that the giant was silenced.

"I was dressing," she said, "or I would have come out before. If you say my father deserted you, you lie!"

Captain Simms turned to her. Dr. Carlsen had risen and moved toward her. Rainey wished he was on the dock. Here was a story breaking that was a *saga* of the north. He did not wish to use it, somehow. The girl's entrance, her vivid, sudden personality forbade that. He felt an intruder as her eyes regarded him, standing by Lund's side in apparent sympathy with him, arrayed against her father. And yet he was not certain that Lund had not been betrayed. The remembrance of the first look in the captain's face when he had glanced up from handling the gold and seen Lund was too keen.

"Go into your cabin, Peggy," said the captain. "This is no place for you. I can handle the matter. Lund has cause for excitement; but I can satisfy him."

Lund stood frozen, like a pointer on scent, all his faculties united in attention toward the girl. To Rainey he seemed

attempting to visualize her by sheer sense of hearing, by perceptions quickened in the blind. The doctor crossed to the girl and spoke to her in a low voice.

Lund spoke, and his voice was suddenly mild.

"I didn't know there was a lady present, miss," he said. "Yore father's right. You let us settle this. We'll come to an agreement."

But, for all his swift change to placability, there was a sinister undertone to his voice that the girl seemed to recognize. She hesitated until her father led her back into the cabin.

"You two'll sit down?" said the doctor, speaking aloud for the first time, his voice amiable, carefully neutral. "And we'll have a drop of something. Mr. Lund, I can understand your attitude. You've suffered a great deal. But you have misunderstood Captain Simms. I have heard about this from him before. He has no desire to cheat you. He is rejoiced to see you alive, though afflicted. He is still Honest Simms, Mr. Lund.

"I haven't your name, sir," he went on pleasantly, to Rainey. "The captain said you were a newspaperman?"

"John Rainey, of the *Times*. I knew nothing of this before I came aboard."

"And you will understand, of course, what Mr. Lund overlooked in his natural agitation, that this is not a story for your paper. We should have a fleet trailing us. We must ask your confidence, Mr. Rainey."

There was a strong personality in the doctor, Rainey realized. Not the blustering, driving force of Lund, but a will that was persistent, powerful. He did not like the man from first appearances. He was too aloof, too sardonic in his attitudes. But his manner was friendly enough, his voice compelling in its suggestion that Rainey was a man to be trusted. Captain Simms came back into the cabin, closing the door of his daughter's room.

"We are going to have a little drink together," said the doctor. "I have some Scotch in my cabin. If you'll excuse me for a moment? Captain, will you get some glasses, and a chair for Mr. Lund?"

The captain looked at Rainey a little uncertainly, and then at Lund, whose aggressiveness seemed to have entirely departed. It was Rainey who got the chair for the latter and seated himself. He would join in a friendly drink and then be well shut of the matter, he told himself.

And he would promise not to print the story, or talk of it. That was rotten newspaper craft, he supposed, but he was not a first-class man, in that sense. He let his own ethics interfere sometimes with his pen and what the paper would deem its best interests. And this was a whale of a yarn.

But it was true that its printing would mean interference with the Karluk's expedition. And there was the girl. Rainey was not going to forget the girl. If the Karluk ever came back? But then she would be an heiress.

Rainey pulled himself up for a fool at the way his thoughts were racing as the doctor came back with a bottle of Scotch whisky and a siphon. The captain had set out glasses and a pitcher of plain water from a rack.

"I imagine you'll be the only one who'll take seltzer, Mr. Rainey," said the doctor pleasantly, passing the bottle. "Captain Simms, I know, uses plain water. Siphons are scarce at sea. I suppose Mr. Lund does the same. And I prefer a still drink."

"Plain water for mine," said Lund.

"We're all charged," said the doctor. "Here's to a better understanding!"

"Glad to see you aboard, Mr. Rainey," said the captain.

Lund merely grunted.

Rainey took a long pull at his glass. The cabin was hot, and he was thirsty. The seltzer tasted a little flat—or the whisky was of an unusual brand, he fancied. And then inertia suddenly seized him. He lost the use of his limbs, of his tongue, when he tried to call out. He saw the doctor's sardonic eyes watching him as he strove to shake off a lethargy that swiftly merged into dizziness.

Dimly he heard the scrape of the captain's chair being pushed back. From far off he heard Lund's big voice booming,

"Here, what's this?" and the doctor's cutting in, low and eager; then he collapsed, his head falling forward on his outstretched arms.

CHAPTER II.

A DIVIDED COMPANY.

IT was not the first time that Rainey had been on a ship, a sailing ship, and at sea. Whenever possible his play-hours had been spent on a little knockabout sloop that he owned jointly with another man, both of them members of the Corinthian Club. While the Curlew had made no blue-water voyages, they had sailed her more than once up and down the California coast on offshore regattas and pleasure-trips, and, lacking experience in actual navigation, Rainey was a pretty handy sailorman for an amateur.

So, as he came out of the grip of the drug that had been given him, slowly, with a brain-pan that seemed overstuffed with cotton and which throbbed with a dull, persistent ache—with a throat that seemed to be coated with ashes, strangely contracted—a nauseated stomach—eyes that saw things through a haze—limbs that ached as if bruised—the sounds that beat their way through his sluggish consciousness were familiar enough to place him almost instantly and aid his memory's flickering film to reel off what had happened.

As he lay there in a narrow bunk, watching the play of light that came through a port-hole beyond his line of vision, noting in this erratic shuttling of reflected sunlight the roll and pitch of cabin walls, listening to the low boom of waves followed by the swash alongside that told him the Karluk was bucking heavy seas, a slow rage mastered him, centered against the doctor with the sardonic smile and Captain Simms, who Rainey felt sure had tacitly approved of the doctor's actions.

He remembered Lund's exclamation of, "Here, what's this?"—the question of a blind man who could not grasp what was happening—and acquitted him.

They had deliberately kidnaped him,

shanghaied him, because they did not choose to trust him, because they thought he might print the story of the island treasure beach in his paper, or babble of it and start a rush to the new strike of which he had seen proof in the gold dust streaming from the poke.

He had been willing to suppress the yarn, Rainey reflected bitterly, his intentions had been fair and square in this situation forced upon him, and they had not trusted him. They were taking no chances, he thought, and suddenly wondered what position the girl would take in the matter. He could not think of her approving it. Yet she would naturally side with her father, as she had done against Lund's accusations. And Rainey suspected that there was something back of Lund's charge of desertion. The girl's face, her graceful figure, the tones of her voice, clung in his still palsied recollection a long time before he could dismiss it and get round to the main factor of his imprisonment—*what were they going to do with him?*

There was a fortune in sight. For gold men forget the obligations of life and law in civilization; they revert to savage type, and their minds and actions are swayed by the primitive urge of lust. Treachery, selfishness, cruelty, crime breed from the shining particles even before they are in actual sight and touch.

Rainey knew that. He had read many true yarns that had come down from the frozen north, in from the deserts and the mountains, tales of the mining records of the West.

He mistrusted the doctor. The man had drugged him. He was a man whose profession, when the mind was warped, belittled life. Captain Simms had been charged with leaving a blind man on a broken floe. Lund was the type whose passions left him ruthless. The crew—they would be bound by shares in the enterprise, a rough lot, daring much and caring little for anything beyond their own narrow horizons. The girl was the only redeeming feature of the situation.

Was it because of her—it might be because of her special pleading—that they had not gone farther? Or were they still

fighting through the heads, waiting until they got well out to sea before they disposed of him, so there would be no chance of his telltale body washing up along the coast for recognition and search for clues? He wondered whether any one had seen him go aboard the Karluk with Lund—any one who would remember it and mention the circumstance when he was found to be missing.

That might take a day or two. At the office they would wonder why he didn't show up to cover his detail, because he had been steady in his work. But they would not suspect foul play at first. He had no immediate family. His landlady lodged other newspapermen, and was used to their vagaries. And all this time the Karluk would be thrashing north, well out to sea, perhaps unsighted, along that coast of fogs, for all her trip.

Rainey had disappeared, dropped out of sight. He would be a front-page wonder for a day, then drop to paragraphs for a day or so more, and that would be the end of it.

But they had made him comfortable. He was not in a smelly fore-castle, but in a bunk in a cabin that must open off the main room of the schooner. Why had they treated him with such consideration? He dozed off, for all his wretchedness, exhausted by his efforts to untangle the snarl. When he awoke again his mouth was glued together with thirst.

The schooner was still fighting the sea—the wind, too, Rainey fancied—sailing close-hauled, going north against the trade. He fumbled for his watch. It had run down. His head ached intolerably. Each hair seemed set in a nerve center of pain. But he was better.

Back of his thirst lay hunger now, and the apathy that had held him to idle thinking had given way to an energy that urged him to action and discovery.

As he sat up in his bunk, fully clothed as he had come aboard, the door of his cabin opened and the doctor appeared, nodded coolly as he saw Rainey moving, disappeared for an instant, and brought in a draft of some sort in a long glass.

"Take this," said Carlsen. "Pull you

together. Then we'll get some food into you."

The calm insolence of the doctor's manner, ignoring all that had happened, seemed to send all the blood in Rainey's body fuming to his brain. He took the glass and hurled its contents at Carlsen's face. The doctor dodged, and the stuff splashed against the cabin wall, only a few drops reaching Carlsen's coat, which he wiped off with his handkerchief, unruffled.

"Don't be a damned fool," he said to Rainey, his voice irritatingly even. "Are you afraid it's drugged? I would not be so clumsy. I could have given you a hypodermic while you slept, enough to keep you unconscious for as many hours as I choose—or forever.

"I'll mix you another dose—one more—take it or leave it. Take it, and you'll soon feel yourself again after Tamada has fed you. Then we'll thrash out the situation. Leave it, and I wash my hands of you. You can go for'ard and bunk with the men and do the dirty work."

He spoke with the calm assumption of one controlling the schooner, Rainey noted, rather as skipper than surgeon. But Rainey felt that he had made a fool of himself, and he took the second draft, that almost instantly relieved him, cleansing his mouth and throat and, as his headache died down, clearing his brain.

"Why did you drug me?" he demanded. "Pretty high-handed. I can make you pay for this."

"Yes? How? When? We're well off Cape Mendocino, heading nor'west or thereabouts. Nothing between 'us and Unalaska but fog and deep water. Before we get back you'll see the payment in a different light. We're not pirates. This was plain business. A million or more in sight.

"Lund nearly spilled things as it was, raving the way he did. It's a wonder some one didn't overhear him with sense enough to tumble.

"We didn't take any chances. Rounded up the crew, and got out. The man who's made a gold discovery thinks everybody else is watching him. If they followed us, they'd crowd us off the beach. I don't

suppose any one has followed us. If they have, we've lost them in this fog.

"But we didn't take any risks after Lund's blowing off. He might have done it ashore before you brought him aboard. I don't think so. But he might. And so might you, later."

"I'd have given you my word."

"And meant to keep it. But you'd have been an uncertain factor, a weak link. You might have given it away in your sleep. You heard enough to figure the general locality of the island when Lund blurted it out. You knew too much. Suppose the Karluk fought up to Kotzebue Bay and found a dozen power-vessels hanging about, waiting for us to lead them to the beach? And we'd have worried all the way up, with you loose. You're a newspaperman. The suppression of this yarn would have obsessed you, lain on your reportorial conscience.

"I don't suppose your salary is much over thirty a week, is it? Now, then, here you are in for a touch of real adventure, better than gleaning dock gossip, to a red-blooded man. If we win—and you saw the gold—you win. We expect to give you a share. We haven't taken it up yet, but it'll be enough. More than you'd earn in ten years, likely. We kidnaped you for your own good. You're a prisoner *de luxe*, with the run of the ship."

"I can work my passage," said Rainey. He could see the force of the doctor's argument, though he didn't like the man. He didn't trust the doctor, though he thought he'd play fair about the gold. But it was funny, his assuming control.

"Yachted a bit?" asked Carlsen.

"Yes."

"Can you navigate?"

Rainey thought he caught a hint of emphasis to this question.

"I can learn," he said. "Got a general idea of it."

"Ah!" The doctor appeared to dismiss the subject with some relief. "Well," he went on, "are you open to reason—and food? I'm sorry about your friends and folks ashore, but you're not the first prodigal who has come back with the fatted calf instead of hungry for it."

"That part of it is all right," said Rainey. There was no help for the situation, save to make the most of it and the best. "But I'd like to ask you a question?"

"Go ahead. Have a cigarette?"

Rainey would rather have taken it from any one else, but the whiff of the burning tobacco, as Carlsen lit up, gave him an irresistible craving for a smoke. Besides, it wouldn't do for the doctor to know he mistrusted him. If he was to be a part of the ship's life, there was small sense in acting pettishly. He took the cigarette, accepted the light, and inhaled gratefully.

"What's the question?" asked Carlsen.

"You weren't on the last trip. You weren't in on the original deal. But I find you doing all the talking, making me offers. You drugged me on your own impulse. Where's the skipper? How does he stand in this matter? Why didn't he come to see me? What is your rating aboard?"

"You're asking a good deal for an outsider, it seems to me, Rainey. I came to you partly as your doctor. But I speak for the captain and the crew. Don't worry about that."

"And Lund?" Rainey could not resist the shot. He had gathered that the doctor resented Lund.

Carlsen's eyes narrowed.

"Lund will be taken care of," he said, and, for the life of him, Rainey could not judge the statement for threat or friendly promise. "As for my status, I expect to be Captain Simms's son-in-law as soon as the trip is over."

"All right," said Rainey. Carlsen's announcement surprised him. Somehow he could not place the girl as the doctor's fiancée. "I suppose the captain may mention this matter," he went on, "to cement it?"

"He may," replied Carlsen enigmatically. "Feel like getting up?"

Rainey rose and bathed face and hands. Carlsen left the cabin. The main room was empty when Rainey entered, but there was a place set at the table. Through the skylight he noted, as he glanced at the telltale compass in the ceiling, that the sun was low toward the west.

The main cabin was well appointed in hardwood, with red cushions on the transoms and a creeping plant or so hanging here and there. A canary chirped up and broke into rolling song. It was all homey, innocuous. Yet he had been drugged at the same table not so long before. And now he was pledged a share of ungathered gold. It was a far cry back to his desk in the *Times* office.

A Japanese entered, sturdy of white-clad figure, deft, polite, furtively/curious. He had brought in some ham and eggs, strong coffee, sliced canned peaches, bread, and butter. He served as Rainey ate heartily, feeling his old self coming back with the food, especially with the coffee.

"Thanks, Tamada," he said as he pushed aside his plate at last.

"Everything arright, sir?" purred the Japanese.

Rainey nodded. The "sir" was reassuring. He was accepted as a somebody aboard the *Karluk*. Tamada cleared away swiftly, and Rainey felt for his own cigarettes. He hesitated a little to smoke in the cabin, thinking of the girl, wondering whether she was on deck, where he intended to go. Some one was snoring in a stateroom off the cabin, and he fancied by its volume it was Lund.

It was a divided ship's company, after all. For he knew that Lund, handicapped with his blindness, would live perpetually suspicious of Simms. And the doctor was against Lund. Rainey's own position was a paradox.

He started for the companionway, and a slight sound made him turn, to face the girl. She looked at him casually as Rainey, to his annoyance, flushed.

"Good afternoon," said Rainey. "Are you going on deck?"

It was not a clever opening, but she seemed to rob him of wit, to an extent. He had yet to know how she stood concerning his presence aboard. Did she countenance the forcible kidnaping of him as a possible tattler? Or—

"My father tells me you have decided to go with us," she said, pleasantly enough, but none too cordially, Rainey thought.

"Dr. Carlsen helped me to my decision."

She did not seem to regard this as a thrust, but stood lightly swaying to the pitch of the vessel, regarding him with grave eyes of appraisal.

"You have not been well," she said. "I hope you are better. Have you eaten?"

Rainey began to think that she was ignorant of the facts. And he made up his mind to ignore them. There was nothing to be gained by telling her things against her father—must less against her fiancé, the doctor.

"Thank you, I have," he said. "I was going to look up Mr. Lund."

The sentence covered a sudden change of mind. He no longer wanted to go on deck with the girl. They were not to be intimates. She was to marry Carlsen. He was an outsider. Carlsen had told him that. So she seemed to regard him, impersonally, without interest. It piqued him.

"Mr. Lund is in the first mate's cabin," said the girl, indicating a door. "Mr. Bergstrom, who was mate, died at sea last voyage. Doctor Carlsen acts as navigator with my father, but he has another room."

She passed him and went on deck. Carlsen was acting first mate as well as surgeon. That meant he had seamanship. Also that they had taken in no replacements, no other men to swell the little corporation of fortune-hunters who knew the secret, or a part of it. It was unusual, but Rainey shrugged his shoulders and rapped on the door of the cabin.

It took loud knocking to waken Lund. At last he roared a "Come in."

Rainey found him seated on the edge of his bunk, dressed in his underclothes, his glasses in place. Rainey wondered whether he slept in them. Lund's uncanny intuition seemed to read the thought. He tapped the lenses.

"Hate to take them off," he said. "Light hurts my eyes, though the optic nerve is dead. Seems to strike through. How're ye makin' out?"

Rainey gave Lund the full benefit of his blindness. The giant could not have known what was in the doctor's mind, but he must have learned something. Lund was not the type to be satisfied with half answers, and undoubtedly felt that he held

a proprietary interest in the Karluk by virtue of his being the original owner of the secret. Rainey wondered if he had sensed the doctor's attitude in that direction, an attitude expressed largely by the expression of Carlsen's face, always wearing the faint shadow of a sneer.

"You know they drugged me," Rainey ended his recital of the interview he had had with the doctor.

"Knockout drops? I guessed it. That doctor's slick. Well, you've not much fault to find, have ye? Carlsen talked sense. Here you're on the road to fortune. I'll see your share's a fair one. There's plenty. It ain't a bad billet you've fallen into, my lad. But I'll look out for ye. I'm sort of responsible for your trip. ye see, matey. And I'll need ye."

He lowered his voice mysteriously.

"You're a writer, Mister Rainey. You've got brains. You can see which way a thing's heading. You've heard enough. I'm blind. I've bin done dirt once aboard the Karluk, and I don't aim to stand for it agin. And I had my eyes, then. No use livin' in a rumpus. Got to keep watch. Got to keep yore eyes open.

"And I ain't got eyes. You have. Use 'em for both of us. I ain't asking ye to take sides, exactly. But I've got cause for bein' suspicious. I don't call the skipper *Honest* Simms no more. And I ain't stuck on that doctor. He's too bossy. He's got the skipper under his thumb. And there's somethin' funny about the skipper. Notice ennything?"

"Why, I don't know him," said Rainey. "He doesn't look extra well, what I've seen of him. Only the once."

"He's logey," said Lund confidentially. "He ain't the same man. Mebbe it's his conscience. But that doctor's runnin' him."

"He's going to marry the captain's daughter," said Rainey.

"Simms's daughter? Carlsen goin' to marry her? Ump! That may account for the milk in the coconut. She's a stranger to me. Lived ashore with her uncle and aunt, they tell me. Carlsen was the family doctor. Now she's off with her father."

His face became crafty, and he reached out for Rainey's knee, found it as readily

as if he had sight, and tapped it for emphasis.

"That makes all the more reason for us lookin' out for things, matey," he went on, almost in a whisper. "If they've played me once they may do it agin. And they've got the odds, settin' aside my eyes. But I can turn a trick or two. 'You an' me come aboard together. You give me a hand. Stick to me, an' I'll see you git yore whack.

"I'll have yore bunk changed. You'll come in with me. An' we'll put one an' one together. We'll be mates. Treat 'em fair if they treat us fair. But don't forget they fixed yore grog. I had nothin' to do with that. I may be stranded, but, if the tide rises—"

He set the clutch of his powerful fingers deep into Rainey's leg above the knee with a grip that left purple bruises there before the day was over.

"We too, matey," he said. "Now you an' me 'll have a tot of stuff that ain't doped."

He moved about the little cabin with an astounding freedom and sureness, chuckling as he handled bottle and glasses and measured out the whisky and water.

"W'en yore blind," he said, ramming his pipe full of black tobacco, "they's other things comes to ye. I know the run of this ship, blindfold, you might say. I c'ud go aloft in a pinch, or steer her. More grog?"

But Rainey abstained after the first glass, though Lund went on lowering the bottle without apparent effect.

"So you're a bit of a sailor?" the giant asked presently. "An' a scholar. You can navigate, I make no doubt?"

"I hope to get a chance to learn on the trip," answered Rainey. "I know the general principles, but I've never tried to use a sextant. I'm going to get the skipper to help me out. Or Carlsen."

"Carlsen! What in hell does a doctor know about navigation?" demanded Lund.

Rainey told him what the girl had said, and the giant grunted.

"I have my doubts whether they'll ever help ye," he said. "Wish I could. But it 'ud be hard without my eyes. An' I've

got no sextant an' no book o' tables. It's too bad."

His disappointment seemed keen, and Rainey could not fathom it. Why had both Lund and Carlsen seemed to lay stress on this matter? Why was the doctor relieved and Lund disappointed at his ignorance?

As they came out of the stateroom together, later, Lund reeking of the liquor he had absorbed, though remaining perfectly sober, his hand laid on Rainey's shoulder, perhaps for guidance, but with a show of familiarity, Rainey saw the girl looking at him with a glance in which contempt showed unveiled. It was plain that his intimacy with Lund was not going to advance him in her favor.

CHAPTER III.

TARGET PRACTICE.

THE Karluk was an eighty-five-ton schooner, Gloster Fisherman type, with a length of ninety and a beam of twenty-five feet. Her enormous stretch of canvas, spread to the limit on all possible occasions by Captain Simms, was offset by the pendulum of lead that made up her keel, and she could slide through the seas at twelve knots on her best point of sailing—reaching—the wind abaft her beam.

After Rainey had demonstrated at the wheel that he had the mastery of her and had shown that he possessed sea-legs, a fair amount of seacraft and, what the sailors did not possess, initiative, Captain Simms appointed him second mate.

"We don't carry one as a rule," the skipper said. "But it'll give you a rating and the right to eat in the cabin." He had not brought up the subject of Rainey's kidnapping, and Rainey let it go. There was no use arguing about the inevitable. The rating and the cabin fare seemed offered as an apology, and he was willing to accept it.

Carlsen acted as first mate, and Rainey had to acknowledge him efficient. He fancied the man must have been a ship's surgeon, and so picked up his seamanship. After a few days Carlsen, save for taking noon observations with the skipper and working out the reckoning, left his duties

largely to Rainey, who was glad enough of the experience. A sailor named Hansen was promoted to acting quartermaster, and relieved Rainey. Carlsen spent most of his time attendant on the girl or chatting with the hunters, with whom he soon appeared on terms of intimacy.

The hunters esteemed themselves above the sailors, as they were, in intelligence and earning capacity. The forecandle men acted, on occasion, as boat-steerers and rowers for the hunters, each of whom had his own boat from which to shoot the cruising seals.

There were six hunters and twelve sailors, outside of a general roustabout and butt named "Sandy," who cleaned up the forecandle and the hunters' quarters, where they messed apart, and helped Tamada, the cook, in the galley with his pots and dishes. But now there was no work in prospect for the hunters, and they lounged on deck or in their 'midship quarters, spinning yarns or playing poker. They were after gold this trip, not seals.

"'Cordin' to the agreement," Lund said to Rainey, "the gold's to be split into a hundred shares. One for each sailorman, an' they chip in for the boy. Two for the hunters, two for the cook, four for Bergstrom, the first mate, who died at sea. Twenty for 'ship's share.' Fifty shares to be split between Simms an' me."

"What's the 'ship's share?'" asked Rainey.

"Represents capital investment. Matter, of fact, it belongs to the gal," said Lund. "Simms give her the Karluk. It's in her name with the insurance."

"Then he and his daughter get forty-five shares, and you only twenty-five?"

"You got it right," grinned Lund. "Simms is no philanthropist. It wa'n't so easy for me to git enyone to go in with me, son. I ain't the first man to come trailin' in with news of a strike. An' I had nothin' to show for it. Not even a color of gold. Nothin' but the word of a dead Aleut, my own jedgment, an' my own sight of an island I never landed on. Matter of fact, Honest Simms was the only one who didn't laff at me outright. It was only his bad luck made him try a chance at gold 'stead of keepin' after pelts.

"An' we had a hard an' tight agreement drawn up on paper, signed, witnessed, an' recorded. Course it holds him as well as it holds me, but he gits the long end of *that* stick. W'en I read, or got it read to me, in the *Seattle News-Courier*, that the Karluk was listed as 'Arrived' in San Francisco, it was all I could do to git car-fare an' grub money. If I hadn't bin blind, an' some of 'em halfway human to'ards a man with his lights out, I'd never have raised it. I'd have got here someways, matey, if I'd had to walk, but I'd have got here a bit late. Then I'd have had to wait till Simms got back agin—an' mébbe starved to death.

"But I'm here an' I've got some say-so. One thing, you're goin' to git Bergstrom's share. I don't give a damn where the doctor comes in. If he marries the gal he'll git her twenty shares, ennyway. Though he ain't married her yet. And I ain't through with Simms yet," he added, with an emphasis that was a trifle grim, Rainey thought.

"The crew, hunters an' sailors, don't seem over glad to see me back," Lund went on. "Mebbe they figgered their shares ud be bigger. Mebbe the doc's queered me. He's pussy-footin' about with 'em a good deal. But I'll talk with you about that later. It's me an' you agin the rest of 'em, seems to me, Rainey. The doc's aimin' to be the Big Boss aboard this schooner. He's got the skipper buffaloed. But not me, not by a jugful."

He slammed his big fist against the side of the bunk so viciously that it seemed to jar the cabin. The blow was typical of the man, Rainey decided. He felt for Lund not exactly a liking, but an attraction, a certain compelled admiration. The giant was elemental, with a driving force inside him that was dynamic, magnetic. What a magnificent pirate he would have made, thought Rainey, looking at his magnificent proportions and considering the crude philosophies that cropped out in his talk.

"I'm in life for the loot of it, Rainey," Lund declared. "Food an' drink to tickle my tongue an' fill my belly, the woman I happen to want, an' bein' able to buy ennything I set my fancy on. The answer to that is gold. With it you can buy most

ennything. Not all wimmen, I'll grant you that. Not the kind of woman I'd want for a steady mate. Thet's one thing I've found out can't be bought, my son, the honor of a good woman. An' thet's the sort of woman I'm lookin' for.

"I reckon yo're raisin' yore eyebrows at that?" he challenged Rainey. "But the other kind, that 'll sell 'emselves, 'll sell you jest as quick—an' quicker. I'd wade through hell-fire hip-deep to git the right kind—an' to hold her. An' I'll buck all hell to git what's comin' to me in the way of luck, or go down all standin' tryin'. This is my gold, an' I'm goin' to handle it. If ennyone tries to swizzle me out of it I'm goin' to swizzle back, an' you can lay to that. Not forgettin' them that stands by me."

Between Lund and Simms there existed a sort of armed truce. No open reference was made to the desertion of Lund on the floe. But Rainey knew that the matter rankled like a canker in Lund's mind. The five, Peggy Simms, her father, Carlsen, Lund and Rainey, ostensibly messed together, but Rainey's duties generally kept him on deck until Carlsen had sufficiently completed his own meal to relieve him. By that time the girl and the captain had left the table.

Lund invariably waited for Rainey. Tamada kept the food hot for them; and served them, Lund making good play with spoon or fork and a piece of bread, the Japanese cutting up his viands conveniently beforehand.

To Rainey, Tamada seemed the hardest worked man aboard ship. He had three messes to cook and he was busy from morning until night, efficient, tireless, and even-tempered. The crew, though they acknowledged his skill, were Californians, either by birth or adoption, and the racial prejudice against the Japanese was apparent.

A week of good wind was followed by dirty weather. The Karluk proved a good fighter, though her headway was materially lessened by contrary wind and sea, and the persistence and increasing opposition of the storm seemed to have a corresponding effect upon Captain Simms.

He grew daily more irritable and mo-

rose, even to his daughter. Only the doctor appeared able to get along with him on easy terms, and Rainey noticed that, to Carlsen, the skipper seemed conciliatory even to deference.

Peggy Simms watched her father with worried eyes. The curious, tarnished look of his tanned skin augmented until the flesh seemed continually dry and of an earthy color; his lips peeled, and more than once he shook as if with a chill.

On the eleventh day out, Rainey went below in the middle of the afternoon for his sea-boots. The gale had suddenly strengthened and, under reefs, the Karluk heeled far over until the hissing seas flooded the scuppers and creamed even with the lee rail. In the main cabin he found Simms seated in a chair with his daughter leaning over him, speaking to her in a harsh, complaining voice.

"No, you can't do a thing for me," he was saying. "It's this sciatica. I've got to get Carlsen."

As Rainey passed through to his own little stateroom neither of them noticed him, but he saw that the captain was shivering, his hands picking almost convulsively at the table-cloth.

"Where's Carlsen, curse him!" Rainey heard through his cabin partition. "Tell him I can't stand this any longer. He's got to help me. Got to. Got to."

As Rainey emerged, walking heavily in his boots, the girl looked up. Her father was slumped in his chair, his face buried on his folded arms. The girl glanced at him doubtfully, apparently uncertain whether to go herself to find Carlsen or stay with her father.

"Anything I can do, Miss Simms? Your father seems quite ill."

The hesitation of the girl even to speak to him was very plain to Rainey. Suddenly she threw up her chin.

"Kindly find Dr. Carlsen," she ordered, rather than requested. "Ask him to come as soon as he can. I—" She turned uncertainly to her father.

"Can I help you to get him into the cabin?" asked Rainey.

She thanked him with lips, not eyes, and he assisted her to shift the almost helpless

man into his room and bunk. He was like a stuffed sack between them, save that his body twitched. While Rainey took most of the weight, he marveled at the strength of the slender girl and the way in which she applied it. Simms seemed to have fainted, to be on the verge of unconsciousness or even utter collapse. Rainey felt his wrist, and the pulse was almost imperceptible.

"I'll get the doctor immediately," he said.

She nodded at him, chafing her father's hands, her own face pale, and a look of anxious fear in her eyes.

"Mighty funny sort of sciatica," Rainey told himself as he hurried forward. He knew where Carlsen was—in the hunters' cozy quarters, playing poker. From the chips in front of him he had been winning heavily.

"The skipper's ill," said Rainey. "No pulse. Almost unconscious."

Carlsen raised his eyebrows.

"Didn't know you were a physician," he said. "Just one of his spells. I'll finish this hand. Too good to lay down. The skipper can wait for once."

The hunters grinned as Carlsen took his time to draw his cards, make his bets, and eventually win the pot on three queens.

"I wonder what your real game is?" Rainey asked himself as he affected to watch the play. According to his own announcement Carlsen was deliberately neglecting the father of the girl he was to marry and at the same time slighting the captain to his own men. Carlsen drew in his chips and leisurely made a note of the amount.

"Quite a while yet to settling-day," he said to the players. "Luck may swing all round the compass before then, boys. All right, Rainey, you needn't wait."

Rainey ignored the omitted "Mister." He held the respect of the sailors, since he had shown his ability, but he knew that the hunters regarded him with an amused tolerance that lacked disrespect by a small margin. To them he was only the amateur sailor. Rainey fancied that the doctor had contributed to this attitude, and it did not lessen his score against Carlsen.

The captain did not make his appearance

for that day, the next, or the next. The men began to roll eyes at each other when they asked after his health. Carlsen kept his own counsel, and Peggy Simms spent most of her time in the main cabin with her eyes always roving to her father's door. Rainey noticed that Tamada brought no food for the sick man. Carlsen was the apparent controller of the schooner. Lund was quick to sense this.

"We got to block that Carlsen's game," he said to Rainey. "There's a nigger in the woodpile somewhere an' you an' me got to uncover him, matey, afore we reach Bering Strait, or you an' me 'll finish this trip squattin' on the rocks of one of the Four Mountain Islands, makin' faces at the gulls.

"I wish you c'ud git under the skin of that Jap. No use tryin' to git in with the crew or the hunters. They're agin both of us—leastwise the hunters are. The hands don't count. They're jest plain hash."

Lund spoke with an absolute contempt of the sailors that was characteristic of the man.

"You think they'd put a blind man ashore that way?" asked Rainey.

"Carlsen would. In a minnit. He'd argy that you c'ud look out for me, seein' as we are chums. As for you, you've bin useful, but you can't navigate, an' you've helped train Hansen to yore work. You were in the way at the start, an' he'd jest as soon git rid of you that road as enny other. He don't intend you to have Bergstrom's share, by a jugful."

Lund grinned as he spoke, and Rainey felt a little chill raise gooseflesh all over his body. It was not exactly fear, but—

"They don't look on us two as *mascots*," went on Lund. "But to git back to that Jap. Forewarned is forearmed. He ain't over an' above liked, but they've got used to him goin' back an' forth with their grub, an' they sort of despise him for a yellow-skinned coolie.

"Now Tamada ain't no coolie. I know Japs. He's a cut above his job. Cooks well enough for a swell billet ashore if he wanted it. An' there ain't much goin' on that Tamada ain't wise to. See if you can't get next to him. Trubble is he's too damn neutral. He knows he's safe, becoz he's cook

an' a damn good one. But he's wise to what Carlsen's playin' at.

"Carlsen don't care for man, woman, God, or the devil. Neither do I," he concluded. "An' I've got a card or two up my sleeve. But I'd sure like to git a peep at what the doc's holdin'."

The storm blew out, and there came a spell of pleasant weather, with the Karluk gliding along, logging a fair rate where a less well-designed vessel would barely have found steerage way, riding an on almost even keel. Simms was still confined to his cabin, though now his daughter took him in an occasional tray.

Except for observations and the details of navigation, Carlsen left the schooner to Rainey. They were well off the coast, out of the fogs, apparently alone upon the lonely ocean that ran sparkling to the far horizon. It was warm, there was little to do, and sailors, as well as the hunters, spent most of their time lounging on the deck.

Save at meal-times Carlsen, for one who had announced himself as an accepted lover, neglected the girl, who had devoted herself to her father. Yet she seldom went into her cabin, never remained there long, and time must have hung heavily on her hands. A girl of her spirit must have resented such treatment, Rainey imagined, but reminded himself it was none of his business.

Lund hung over the rail, smoking, or paced the deck, always close to Rainey. The manner in which he went about the ship was almost uncanny. Save that his arms were generally ahead of him when he moved, his hands, with their woolly covering of red hair, lightly touching boom or rope or rail, he showed no hesitation, made no mistakes.

He no longer shuffled, as he had on shore, but moved with a pantherlike dexterity, here and there at will. When the breeze was steady he would even take the wheel and steer perfectly by the "feel of the wind" on his cheek, the slap of the wind in the canvas, or the creak of the rigging to tell him if he was holding to the course. And he took an almost childish delight in proclaiming his prowess as helmsman.

The booms were stayed out against swinging in flaws and the roll of the sea, and

Lund strode back and forth behind Rainey, who had the wheel. The hunters were grouped about Carlsen, who, seated on the skylight, was telling them something at which they guffawed at frequent intervals.

"Spinnin' them some of his smutty yarns," growled Lund, halting in his promenade. "Bad for discipline, an' bad for us. He's the sort of fine-feathered bird that wouldn't give those chaps a first look ashore. Gittin' in solid with 'em that way is a bad steer. You can't handle a man you make a pal of, w'en he ain't yore rank."

"Carlsen's slack, but he's a good sailor-man," said Rainey casually.

"Damn sight better sailorman than he is doctor," retorted Lund. "Hear him the other mornin' w'en I asked him if he c'ud give me somethin' to help my eyes hurtin'? 'I'm no eye specialist,' sez he. 'Try some boracic acid, my man.' I wouldn't put ennything in my eyes *he'd* give me, you can lay to that. He'd give me vitriol, if he thought I'd use it. I wouldn't let him treat a sick cat o' mine. He's the kind o' doctor that uses his title to give him privileges with the wimmin. I know his sort."

Rainey wondered why Lund had asked Carlsen for a lotion if he did not mean to use it, but he did not provoke further argument. Lund was going on.

"He don't do the skipper enny good, thet's certain."

"Captain Simms seems to believe in him," answered Rainey. He wondered how much of Carlsen's increasing dominance over the skipper Lund had noticed.

"Simms is Carlsen's dog!" exploded Lund. "The doc's got somethin' on him, mark me. Carlsen's a bad egg an', w'en he hatches, you'll see a buzzard. An' you wait till he's needed as a doctor on somethin' that takes more'n a few kind words or a lick out a bottle."

There was a stir among the hunters. Lund turned his spectacled eyes in the direction of the slight noise they made.

"What are they up to now?" he queried. "Goin' to play poker? Wish I had my eyes. I'd show 'em how to read the pips."

Hansen came aft, offering to take the wheel.

"They bane goin' to shute at targets," he said. "Meester Carlsen he put up prizes. For rifle an' shotgun. Thought you might like to watch it, sir."

Rainey gave over the spokes and went to the starboard rail with Lund, watching the preparations between fore and main masts for the competition, and telling Lund what was happening. Carlsen gave out some shotgun cartridges from cardboard boxes, twelve to each of the six hunters.

"Hunters pay for their own shells," said Lund. "But they buy 'em from the ship. Mate's perkisite. They usually have some shells on hand for the rifles, but the paper cases o' the shotgun cartridges suck up the damp an' they keep better in the magazine in the cabin. What they shootin' at? Bottles?"

Sandy, the roustabout, had been requisitioned to toss up empty bottles, and those who failed cursed him for a poor thrower. A hunter named Deming made no misses, and secured the first prize of ten dollars in gold with a man named Beale scoring two behind him, and getting half the amount from Carlsen.

Then came the test with the rifles. The weapons were all of the same caliber, well oiled, and in perfect condition. As Lund had said, each of the hunters had a few shells in his possession, but they lacked the total of six dozen by a considerable margin.

Carlsen went below for the necessary ammunition while the target was completed and set in place. A keg had been rigged with a weight underslung to keep it upright, and a tin can, painted white, set on a short spar in one end of the keg. A light line was attached to a bridle, and the mark lowered over the stern, where it rode, bobbing in the trail of the schooner's wake, thirty fathoms from the taffrail where the crowd gathered.

Carlsen, returning, ordered Hansen to steer fine. He gave each competitor a limit of ten seconds for his aim, contributing an element of chance that made the contest a sporting one. Without the counting, each would have deliberately waited for the most favorable moment when the schooner hung in the trough and the white can was backed

by green water. As it was, it made a far-from-easy mark, slithering, lurching, dipping as the Karluk slid down a wave or met a fresh one, the can often blurred against the blobs of foam.

More bullets hit the keg than the can, and Carlsen was often called upon as umpire. But the tin gradually became ragged and blotched where the steel-jacketed missiles tore through. Beale and Deming both had five clean, undisputed hits, tying for first prize. Beale offered to shoot it off with six more shells apiece, and Deming consented.

"Can't be done," declared Carlsen. "Not right now, anyway. I gave out the last shell there was in the magazine. If there are any more the skipper's got them stowed away, and I can't disturb him."

"Derned funny," said Deming, "a sealer shy on cartridges! Lucky we ain't worryin' about thet sort of a cargo."

"Probably plenty aboard somewhere," said Carlsen, "but I don't know where they are. Sorry to break up the shooting. You boys have got me beaten on rifles and shot-guns," he went on, producing from his hip pocket a flat, effective-looking automatic pistol of heavy caliber. "How are you on small arms?"

The hunters shook their heads dubiously.

"Never use 'em," said Deming. "Never could do much with that kind, ennyhow. Give me a revolver, an' I might make out to hit a whale, if he was close enough, but not with one o' them."

"Not much difference," said Carlsen. "Any of you got revolvers?"

No one spoke. It was against the unwritten laws of a vessel for pistols to be owned forward of the main cabin. Beale finally answered for the rest.

"Nary a pistol, sir."

"Then," said Carlsen, "I'll give you an exhibition myself. Any bottles left? Beale, will you toss them for me?"

There were eight shots in the automatic, and Carlsen smashed seven bottles in mid-air. He missed the last, but retrieved himself by breaking it as it dipped in the wake. The hunters shouted their appreciation.

"Break all of 'em?" Lund asked Rainey. "Enny bottles left at all?"

He walked toward the taffrail, addressing Carlsen.

"Kin you shoot by *sound* as well as by sight, doc?" he challenged.

"I fancy not," said Carlsen.

"If I had my eyes I'd snapshoot ye for a hundred bucks," said Lund. "As it is, I might target one or two. Rainey, have some one run a line, head-high, an' fix a bottle on it, will ye? I ain't got a gun o' my own, doc," he continued, "will you lend me yours?" Carlsen filled his clip and Lund turned toward Rainey, who was rigging the target.

"I'll want you to tap it with a stick," he said. "Signal-flag staff 'll do fine."

Rainey got the slender bamboo and stood by. Lund felt for the cord, passed his fingers over the suspended bottle and, wheeling, stepped off five paces, hefting the automatic in his palm to judge its balance.

"Rather have my own gun," he muttered. "All right, tetch her up, Rainey."

Rainey tapped the bottle on the neck and it gave out a little tinkle, lost immediately in the crash of splintering glass as the bottle, hit fairly in the torn label, broke in half.

"How much left?" asked Lund. "Half? Tetch it up."

Again he fired and again the bullet found the mark, leaving only the neck of the bottle still hanging. Lund grinned.

"Thet's all," he said. "Jest wanted to show ye what a blind man can do, if he's put to it."

There was little applause. Carlsen took his gun in silence and moved forward with the hunters and the onlookers, disappearing below. Rainey took the wheel over from Hansen and ordered him forward again.

"Give 'em something to talk about," chuckled Lund. "Carlsen wanted to show off his fancy shootin'. Wal, I've shown 'em I ain't entirely wrecked if I ain't carryin' lights. An' I slipped more 'n one over on Carlsen at that."

Rainey did not catch his entire meaning and said nothing.

"Did you get wise to the play about the shells?" asked Lund. "A smart trick, though Deming almost tumbled. Carlsen got those dumb fools of hunters to fire away

every shell they happened to have for'ard. If the magazine's empty, I'll bet Carlsen knows where they's plenty more shells, if we ever needed 'em bad. But now those rifles an' shotguns ain't no more use than so many clubs—not to the hunters. An' he's found out they ain't got enny pistols. He's got one, an' shows 'em how straight he shoots, jest in case there should be enny trubble between 'em. Plays both ends to the middle, does Carlsen. Slick! But he ain't won the pot. They's a joker in this game. Mebbe he holds it, mebbe not."

He nodded mysteriously, well pleased with himself.

"Don't suppose *you* brought a gun along with ye?" he asked Rainey. "Might come in handy."

"I wasn't expecting to stay," Rainey replied dryly, "or I might have."

Lund laughed heartily, slapping his leg.

"That's a good un," he declared. "It would have bin a good idea, though. It sure pays to go heeled when you travel with strangers."

CHAPTER IV.

THE "BOWHEAD."

CAPTAIN SIMMS appeared again in the cabin and on deck, but he was not the same man. His illness seemed to have robbed him permanently of what was left him of the spring of manhood. It was as if his juices had been sucked from his veins and arteries and tissues, leaving him flabby, irresolute, compared to his former self. Even as Lund shadowed Rainey, so Simms shadowed Carlsen.

The fine weather vanished, snuffed out in an hour and, day after day, the Karluk flung herself at mocking seas that pounded her bows with blows that sounded like the noise of a giant's drum. The sun was never seen. Through daylight hours the schooner wrestled with the elements in a ghastly, purplish twilight, lifting and sending under double reefs over great waves that raised spuming crests to overwhelm her, and were ridden down, hissing and roaring, burying one rail and covering the deck to the hatches with yeasty turmoil.

The Karluk charged the stubborn fury of the gale, rolling from side to side, lancing the seas, gaining a little headway, losing leeway, fighting, fighting, while every foot of timber, every fathom of rope, groaned and creaked perpetually, but endured.

To Rainey, this persistent struggle—as he himself controlled the schooner, legs far astride, his oilskins dripping, his feet awash to the ankles, spume drenching and whipping him, the wind a lash—brought exultation and a sense of mastery and confidence such as he had never before held suggestion of. To guide the ship, constantly to baffle the sea and wind, the turbulence, buffeting bows and run and counter, smashing at the rudder, leaping always like a pack of yapping hounds—this was a thing that left the days of his water-front detail far behind.

And then he had thought himself in the whirl of things! Even as Simms seemed to be declining, so Rainey felt that he was coming into the fulness of strength and health.

Lund was ever with him. Sometimes the girl would come up on deck in her own waterproofs and stand against the rail to watch the storm, silent so far as the pair were concerned. And presently Carlsen would come from below or forward and stand to talk with her until she was tired of the deck.

They did not seem much like lovers, Rainey fancied. They lacked the little intimacies that he, though he made himself somewhat of an automaton at the wheel, could not have failed to see. If the girl slipped, Carlsen's hand would catch and steady her by the arm; never go about her waist. And there was no especial look of welcome in her face when the doctor came to her.

Carlsen seldom took over the wheel. Rainey did more than his share from sheer love of feeling the control. But one day, at a word from the girl, Carlsen and she came up to Rainey as he handled the spokes.

"I'll take the wheel a while, Rainey," said the doctor.

Rainey gave it up and went amidships. Out of the tail of his eye he could see that the girl was pleading to handle the ship and that Carlsen was going to let her do so.

Rainey shrugged his shoulders. It was Carlsen's risk. It was no child's play in that weather to steer properly. The Karluk, with her narrow beam, was lithe and active as a great cat in those waves. It took not only strength, but watchfulness and experience to hold the course in the welter of cross-seas.

Lund, whose recognition of voices was perfect, moved amidships as soon as Carlsen and Peggy Simms came aft. There was no attempt at disguising the fact that the schooner's afterward was a divided company and, save for the fact of his blindness tempering the action, the manner of Lund's showing them his back and deliberately walking off would have been a deliberate insult.

Not to the girl, Rainey thought. At first he had considered Lund's character as comparatively simple—and brutal—but he had qualified this without-seeming consciousness, and he felt that Lund would never deliberately insult a woman—any sort of a woman. He was beginning to feel something more than an admiration for Lund's strength, a liking for the man himself had, almost against his will, begun to assert itself.

They stood together by the weather-rail. It was still Rainey's deck-watch, and at any moment Carlsen might relinquish the wheel back to him as soon as the girl got tired. Suddenly shouts sounded from forward, a medley of them, indistinct against the quartering wind. Sandy, the roustabout, came dashing aft along the sloping deck, catching clumsily at rail and rope to steady himself, flushed with excitement, almost hysterical with his news.

"A bowhead, sir!" he cried when he saw Rainey. "And killers after him! Blowin' dead ahead!"

Beyond the bows Rainey could see nothing of the whale, that must have sounded in fear of the killers, but he saw half a dozen scythelike, black fins cutting the water in streaks of foam, all abreast, their high dorsals waving, wolves of the sea, hunting for the gray bowhead whale to force its mouth open to feast on the delicacy of its living tongue. So Lund told him in swift sen-

tences while they waited for the whale to broach.

"Ha'f the time the bowheads won't even try an' git away," said Lund. "Lie atop, belly up, plain jellied with fear while the killers help 'emselves. Ha'f the bowheads you git have got chunks bitten out of their tongues. If they're nigh shore when the killers show up the whales 'll slide way out over the rocks an' strand 'emselves."

Rainey glanced aft. Sandy had carried his warning to Carlsen and the girl, and now was craning over the lee rail, knee-deep in the wash, trying to see something of the combat. Peggy Simms's lithe figure was leaning to one side as she, too, gazed ahead, though she still paid attention to her steering and held the schooner well up, her face bright with excitement, wet with flying brine, wisps of yellow hair streaming free in the wind from beneath the close grip of her woolen tam-o'-shanter bonnet of scarlet. Carlsen was pointing out the racing fins of the killers.

"Bl-o-ows!" started the deep voice of a lookout, from where sailors and hunters had grouped in the bows to witness this gladiatorial combat between sea monsters, staged fittingly in a sea that was running wild. Rainey strained his gaze to catch the steamy spiracle* and the outthrust of the head.

"Bl-o-ows!" The deep voice almost leaped an octave in a sudden shrill of apprehension. Other voices mingled with his in a clamor of dismay.

"Look out! Oh, look out! Dead ahead!"

The enormous bulk of the whale had appeared, not to spout, but to lie belly up, rocking on the surface with fins outspread, paralyzed with terror, directly in the course of the Karluk, while toward it, intent only on their blood lust, leaped the killers, thrusting at its head as the schooner surged down. In that tremendous sea the impact would be certain to mean the staving in of something forward, perhaps the springing of a butt.

"Hard a lee!" yelled Rainey. "Up with her! Up!"

It was desire to vent his own feelings,

* Blowhole or nostril.

rather than necessity for the command, that made Rainey yell the order, for he could see the girl striving with the spokes, Carlsen lending his strength to hers. The sheets were well flattened, the wind almost abeam, and there was no need to change the set of fore and main.

Forward, the men jumped to handle the headsails. The Karluk started to spin about on its keel, instinct to the changing plane of the rudder. But the waves were running tremendously high, and the wind blowing with great force, the water rolling in great mountains of sickly greenish gray, topped with foam that blew in a level scud.

As the schooner hung in a deep trough the wind struck at her, bows on. With the

gale suddenly spilled out of them, the topsails lashed and shivered, and the fore broke loose with the sharp report of a gunshot and disappeared aft in the smother.

Rainey saw one huge billow rising, curving, high as the gaff of the main, it seemed to him, as he grasped at the coil of the main halyards. Down came the tons of water, booming on the deck that bent under the blow, spilling in a great cataract that swashed across the deck.

His feet were swept from under him; for a moment he seemed to swing horizontal in the stream, clutching at the halyards. The sea struck the opposite rail with a roar that threatened to tear it away, piling up and then seething overboard.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Slap

by  Roy W. Hinds

NICHOLAS FELD sat gloomily in the gloomiest corner of his shop. Now and then he turned an indifferent gaze upon a shabby man who, with the practised hand and eye of a connoisseur, was picking over a great mound of second-hand shoes—a heap of cracked and worn leather; a veritable mountain of misfortune, each pair speaking eloquently of the calamity which had driven the former owner to dump it there.

The man found what he wanted, or what he thought he wanted, and took the shoes over to Nicholas Feld. Mr. Feld clutched them in his huge hands, and studied them thoughtfully as he turned them over and over.

Finally he announced: "One dollar."

"A dollar!" exclaimed the customer.

"One dollar," Nicholas Feld repeated. The bored monotony of his tone did not vary a semiquaver.

"Why," argued the shabby man, "why—I've sold shoes that was better'n them for a quarter!"

"One dollar," quoth Nicholas Feld.

"You don't want much, do you? A dollar for that set of dogs! Where d'you get that at, uh? Why, them mud-soakers won't wear a week. I can get a new pair for a little more'n that."

"One dollar."

The man meditated. "Besides that," he countered, "they won't fit me."

Nicholas Feld waved his hand toward the mound of shoes. "Take your pick," said he. "You should get a fine fit there."

"Say!" The man held the shoes out at arm's length and gazed at them derisively. "Say, how much did you give for them heel-bruises? I'll bet they didn't cost you more'n fifteen cents."

"You should have them for one dollar," said Nicholas Feld serenely.

The customer grunted his disgust and hurled the shoes back on the heap. He started for the door, but changed his mind and resumed his search. Nicholas Feld observed again that the shoes the man wore were scarcely more than a dilapidated set of uppers. The man *must* buy shoes.

But he was unable to find anything that suited him better. He returned again and again to the shoes he had first chosen—and was quite free with disparaging talk, finding fresh faults with them at each inspection.

Nicholas Feld kept his chair, dissembling stolid indifference. His eyes gleamed bitterly for just an instant when a troop of small boys, on their way home from the school in Mulberry Street, halted just outside his open door and howled the derision and contempt in which they held "Old Nick Feld." This sally was a daily occurrence, and the boys made it now more as a matter of routine. Having their uncompimentary opinions out of their systems for the day, they fled—although they knew that Nicholas Feld would not give chase. There was a time when he sought to run them down, but he had despaired long ago of ever catching one of the urchins.

The customer finally returned to the shopkeeper's side with the original pair of shoes.

"I'll give you fifty cents for them slush-absorbers," he said in a tone of finality. "I'll take 'em for that—or leave 'em."

"Leave 'em," advised Nicholas Feld evenly.

"But that's all the money I got."

"You should find cheaper shoes in that pile."

"Ain't I got to have shoes that 'll stay on my feet? I'm on the asphalt now, ain't I?—and there ain't nothin' in that pile

that's much better'n I got on. What d'you say—fifty cents, or no sale?"

"No—"

A newcomer loomed in the doorway. A startled gleam shone for a moment in the eye of Nicholas Feld, and then flitted away as he quickly gripped his composure. But the spasm of misgiving was justified, for the latest visitor was huge and strong; with great hulking shoulders—and he was angry. Anger is a mild word for the rage that burned in the man's eyes. "Heavy" Windover, burglar, was a bad man to tamper with—and Nicholas Feld had tampered with him.

Windover strode straight to the shopkeeper's chair and glowered over him. He ignored the presence of the man at the pile of shoes.

"You know what you got comin' to you, don't you?" Heavy demanded.

"I thought you should know different than to come in here when you're drinking," Nicholas Feld remonstrated.

"Well, I did come in, didn't I?"

"But it is better that you should go away—and come back again some time; to-morrow, maybe, if you are sober."

"It's better that I stay right here—until I get what's comin' to me; and I ain't goin' to wait long for that."

Nicholas Feld turned to the customer.

"Give me the fifty cents," said he, "and you should take the shoes out with you right away."

The man studied a few coins in the palm of his hand. He announced: "I see I ain't got but forty cents."

"Give it to me quick—and take the shoes out with you!"

The transaction completed, Nicholas Feld was soon alone with the threatening Heavy Windover.

Nicholas Feld was by no means small—and he was not a coward. He wasn't a brave man, either, in the sense which the word brave implies. His courage was the courage of the tiger—skulking, lying in wait, leaping upon the unsuspecting. Confidence he had in his strength, though he hadn't fought a man in years.

His sloping shoulders had vast strength in them. His arms were amazingly long.

He was strong with animality; muscles lithe and tenacious. He gazed serenely upon Heavy Windover—and the concentrated gaze of Nicholas Feld always aroused loathing and anger in the burglar. One of the shopkeeper's eyes was puckered by a squint, and appeared of different color from the other—and was very much the sharper. His gaze left upon one the unpleasantly odd sensation of being scrutinized by two persons from one pair of eyes.

"Now what should be the matter with you?" he asked Windover.

"Matter! You know what's the matter. You know how you trimmed me on that sack of plate. You know it, don't you?"

"I—Nicholas Feld—trimmed *you*?"

"Don't try to belly out of it," Heavy warned him. "I want what's comin' to me."

"Why should you think there is something coming to you?"

"Because I saw in the papers how much that stuff was worth."

"The papers do not always say what is true," Feld suggested. "I have read it sometimes of very much money that a thing is worth—but it is not always worth that much. There are people that tell things that are not so to the papers. There are people who like to see it in the papers that they have lost things of a great value, when they have lost things of little value."

"I know what I'm talkin' about in this case," Heavy persisted doggedly, "because I described all that stuff to some friends of mine. And I know by the reward that the stuff is worth twice as much as you swore it was. I know you trimmed me—and I'm hard up for money. I'm goin' to have it. I got it all figured out, and you owe me about a hundred dollars—and that's lettin' you off soft, too. Come on, let's have it!"

"I have no such a hundred dollars for you," Feld told him, solemnly wagging his bulging head.

"Then I'm goin' to 'bash' you!" Heavy warned him. "I've sworn to do that—and I'll give you just one minute to produce. Get up on your pins, you stinking 'rail,' and start for that money."

Nicholas Feld got slowly to his feet. It was the slowness of caution and unnatural,

for he could move very quickly. He was impelled by a sense of self-defense. He stepped back a few paces and calmly surveyed the burglar.

"It is a bad thing that you and me should fight," said he. "It is a bad thing that people should see us at fighting. The police might come, and you and me do not want that the police should come. I say for you to go away. That will be very much the best thing to do."

"Are you goin' to give me that money?" demanded Windover. He stepped closely enough to Feld so that their eyes burned into each other's. Furious combat was imminent. "Come!" demanded the burglar. "Produce the money!"

"I will not. It is very much best—"

But Nicholas Feld got no further in his remonstrance. The open, flat hand of Heavy Windover smote his cheek in a stinging, burning slap. It was worse than the blow of a fist. It lacked the crushing, soul-satisfying smash of a fist. A man doesn't mind being struck as a man should be struck—but he hates dreadfully to be slapped.

The slap sent the shopkeeper reeling a trifle, but he soon recovered his balance and sprang like a panther upon the burglar. The battle was cruel, desperate in sheer ferocity, but it was short. Nicholas Feld was a powerful man, but he was no match for the burglar—and the latter walked out in a few minutes, breathing heavily and with a few discolorations on his face and dust-spots on his clothing.

Nicholas Feld, severely but not dangerously beaten, sat gasping in his rocking-chair. With a soiled handkerchief he pecked and dabbed at the bruises on his face. He wasn't conscious of excruciating pain. His bones ached dully. The bruises smarted—tingled.

But above and beyond all else was the terrible sting and burn of the slap—a burning not upon the cheek, but upon the spirit. His rage grew and swelled into a terrible hatred of the man who had inflicted that slap.

He thought of the terrible names the man had called him—invectives hurled with each blow. He thought of the loathing,

the contempt, which had burned in the man's eyes. And he thought, and he knew he would always think, of that slap in the face. The imprint of the man's hand was seared deeply into his soul—and never would quite cease to burn.

Thus, for the first time in his life, Nicholas Feld found himself furiously hating another man—hating him with all the fervor of a terrible vindictiveness; all the bitterness of a chilled heart which was none the less strong because he hadn't hated before. Toward all mankind he had been indifferent—never hating, never loving, merely without the instincts of enmity or affection. He never had cared the snap of a finger for the welfare or downfall of any man.

But now he hated. He hated the man's flesh and bone. He hated his eyes. He hated his heart. He hated every tissue and stitch of the man and every hair of his head.

Within a day or so Heavy Windover was on the mind of Nicholas Feld almost to the exclusion of everything else. His happiness—or what passed with him for happiness—was gone. He was as greedy for gold as ever, and he was as watchful as ever. But his customers, the poor who came in a thin but never-ending stream to the door of his gloomy shop, noticed vaguely that there was something in his face besides the old leer of greed.

But Nicholas Feld never failed to cheat his penny-needy customers when he could. He battered down the prices they asked for trinkets and old clothing, and drove up the prices he asked for the junk he sold.

Those who came to the shop to buy picked over the dilapidated collection until they found what was wanted. Nicholas Feld made no pretense of salesmanship. He sat stoically, with the squinting eye and the wide-open eye ever watchful.

The customer must come to the seller and haggle a moment or two or an hour or two, and finally pay the price of Nicholas Feld. He didn't object to a customer haggling with him. He rather liked it—it provided a diversion, sharpened his tongue, and, at the outcome, left him with a comforting sense of having achieved a victory and more money.

There was in his shop all the junk one would expect to find in a place which drew its stock from the very poor of Baxter and Mulberry Streets, and the derelicts who wandered over that way from Chatham Square and the Bowery—junk less useful than food to the poor, and less desirable than drink to the derelicts. It was the accumulation of years, and it provided the ostensible stock in trade of Nicholas Feld.

But Nicholas Feld had another stock in trade of which he made no display, and which was known only to the chosen.

He was a "mole." That is a crook's pet name for a "fence," as the general public knows a man who deals in stolen property. The mole is a term of disrespect, meaning one who grovels under ground and in the dark. The crook applies that term only to the fence who cheats him; to the fence who belies the old saying that there is honor among thieves. The fence who plays straight is sometimes called a "wire," a humorous comparison with the straightness of a wire fence, while the crooked fence also is called a "rail"—and the term is appropriate, indeed, when one remembers the crookedness of a rail fence.

Nicholas Feld was a successful fence, and a perfect specimen of the mole and the rail. He dealt with some of the most successful crooks in the city. He cheated them when he could, but altogether he was so safe and reliable that these men kept coming back to him with their ill-gotten goods.

He had a seemingly undiscoverable "route" for disposing of stolen property, a route safer than any other in the city—and the crooks liked that. There was no danger, when one dealt with Nicholas Feld, of the trail being run back to its source. Never had the police shown suspicion of Feld or his shop. He was questioned about certain property now and then, but so was every second-hand dealer in the city—but he had never been questioned about the goods he bought from known thieves. The police believed him utterly harmless—thus he operated in safety.

To a man who lived only for the purpose of amassing gold, life for Nicholas Feld had been full and plenty, for he had

amassed very much gold, and was amassing more with each rise and decline of the sun. Single of purpose, all things else in the world bothered him not. Thus he had been contented.

Contented he was until Heavy Windover, burglar, strode into his shop and beat him in body and in spirit. His unruffled calm had been blown away by the shifting blasts of hot and cold hatred.

It was in the very nature of things that Nicholas Feld should seek revenge.

A yellow speck detached itself from the scurrying throngs of Baxter Street and floated into the shop of Nicholas Feld. It was a human form, but it moved without sound—without even a faint shuffle of its sandaled feet. Diminutive and withered it was—and clad in strange garments.

A wispy black mustache hung down on the lower cheeks in long strands. Its pantalooned legs described the process of locomotion, but the silent tread made the figure appear like a dangling creature suspended from a wire. Two thin hands, outstretched one over the other, were pressed against the abdomen—as though its owner suffered from cramps; but the attitude was no more than characteristic.

Thus did Ming Yuen slip over from his curio shop in Chinatown, one of whose yellow borders is jammed against Baxter Street, to talk of business with his friend, Nicholas Feld.

Ming Yuen, old and withered, and whose skull-capped head hardly came above Nicholas Feld's dusty show-case, was one of the very few men who could bring the shopkeeper from his rocking-chair. There was a deal of friendship between these two outlandish mortals—who came from far ends of the earth to meet in a strange land; and, meeting, to unite their craft and stealth in plucking the gold of that land. There was no affection between them—but there was a sort of friendship; rather a feeling of mutual need. For Ming Yuen was one of the chief stations in Nicholas Feld's mysterious "route."

The shopkeeper scrambled to his feet. He nodded. Ming Yuen nodded. Neither spoke until chairs had been drawn closely together in a gloomy corner. Then they

talked long and earnestly. Their business done, Ming Yuen arose to depart. Nicholas Feld detained him.

He inquired: "In China what is it that they do to a man who should try and get the best of another man?"

"Many things—much things," croaked Ming Yuen. "If he tly ver' hard—all the same he get it hard."

"How is it that a man should do hard things to another man with no—with—without—"

The shopkeeper flung a gesture which conveyed his meaning. Ming Yuen understood. He replied: "Hurt him bly many things—much things."

Nicholas Feld meditated. "You and me are friends," said he. "I should not stop at telling you secrets. It is not very much that I want to do—but there is something I should do. There is a man—"

And the shopkeeper told his friend from Chinatown the story of Heavy Windover. He told him, as best he could, just how he felt toward Heavy Windover.

Ming Yuen plumbed the depths of Nicholas Feld's hatred. He knew just why the man hated—and in Ming Yuen's country they have strange ways of inflicting revenge. He knew that Nicholas Feld didn't wish to take the supreme revenge—but revenge he must have.

Ming Yuen meditated—profoundly. Finally he spoke a few words, and significantly patted the right hand of Nicholas Feld. The shopkeeper's eyes flared with inspiration. For a long time they talked.

"And you say thousand dolla'?" queried the old Chinese. "Can bly many things—much things—for thousand dolla'. Me see my fr'en', Bagg."

"I will pay him one thousand dollars," repeated Nicholas Feld. "It should be worth it."

Ming Yuen departed as he came. The rustle of footsteps on the sidewalks of Baxter Street; the clatter of trucks; the throaty cries of hucksters; the shrill voices of children—the din came raging up to the very doorway of the shop, and then seemed to quiet and slink away in terror at the cave-like gloom inside. The shopkeeper paid no heed to the noises of the day. The meas-

ured creaking of his rocking-chair kept pace with his calm meditations.

That afternoon, in his curio shop, Ming Yuen had much to say to "Bagg the Chink," a young man who wasn't a Chink at all, but who lived his shady life in Chinatown—and had thereby come by the picturesque sobriquet.

A drooping cigarette hung drowsily from Bagg's pale lips. His hands twitched nervously. He frequently jerked off his hat, only to replace it again. Perspiration beaded his brow and came back again as soon as he brushed it off. He listened, nervously, to Ming Yuen's croaking arguments.

"I don't want to do this thing," Bagg remonstrated. "Heavy Windover never done nothin' to me." As an afterthought: "Heavy Windover's a bad man to monkey with." In a moment: "Did you say a thousand dollars?"

"One thousand dolla'."

"But s'posin' he pegged me? S'posin' I didn't get him right—and he sprung to what I was doin'? Why, Heavy Windover wouldn't wait a second! He'd bump me right there!"

"It is ver' easy," countered the wily Ming Yuen. "You be at windows with him before now—uh? Long time maybe you wait—but bimebly you get him. One thousand dolla'. How much Mr. Windover play you?"

"A hundred dollars a job," asserted Bagg the Chink with a trace of bitterness. "He never ties fifty-fifty with a window-man. He weeds him a hundred dollars a job—and pays him a hundred dollars if the drag is a million dollars or a dime. Nobody knows what *he* yanks out!"

"One thousand dolla'," repeated Ming Yuen. "Ten jobs in one—uh?"

"I'll do it," announced Bagg the Chink in sudden decision. "Slip me the details and ten dollars right now."

He got both.

Bagg the Chink was an expert window-man, the underpaid crook who plays second fiddle to the burglar. He knew nothing about ransacking a house. He lacked the element of dogged courage which it requires to go from room to room of a darkened interior—never certain whether sud-

den death is not lurking in the next room. He knew nothing about opening silver-chests. He knew nothing of the various devices which a burglar resorts to to avoid waking householders, or, if they do awake, to make them drop back to sleep again. Bagg the Chink was not a burglar. But he was an expert window-man, and worked with burglars.

He had worked with Heavy Windover. Heavy had paid him one hundred dollars a job—and Bagg, like his kind, always nursed the sore spots which are known to men who think they are not getting a fair deal. He had no affection for Heavy—and no more dislike than he had for any burglar.

Heavy Windover, feeling puffed up as an employer of labor, had grown domineering and exacting. He seldom condescended to associate with window-men and those crooks whom he regarded as beneath the social scale of a burglar. He drove his window-men to quick work. He was sometimes referred to as Simon Legree. One disgruntled "pane-tapper" started the rumor that Heavy Windover was thinking of carrying a time-clock with him to each "job" and compelling the window-man to punch in and out.

But Heavy Windover had his weaknesses. Most crooks have—in one way or another; or in many ways. Heavy's most pronounced weakness lay in the most common vice—whisky. It was very hard to get—whisky; but not impossible. It was easier for Heavy to get it than it was for those who moved in higher walks of life. Heavy's life was in the underworld—and the underworld naturally made a greater effort to supply its dry throats. There was big profit in it now, too. Heavy declared a man couldn't get "soused" any more on the proceeds of one "job"; it took a sackful of silver plate to buy a quart of "hooch." And that was a good name for it.

In his cups or his bottles, from which ever he drank, the austerity of Heavy Windover toward the lesser fry of crooks usually unbent. At times he had no objection to drinking with a window-man. On this particular night he met Bagg the Chink. He didn't know that Bagg had

sought him out. He was much pleased with Bagg's proposal to drink more. Bagg assured him he could get any quantity of it—over in Chinatown.

"I don't like much to mix up with that yellow-and-white gang of grafters over there," announced Heavy; "but I ask you—what's a man goin' to do? He's got to drink, ain't he?"

This was so self-evident a fact that Bagg the Chink didn't deem it worthy of a reply. He led Heavy to a vile den in Pell Street. They had many drinks. Heavy absorbed every drop that was set before him. Bagg the Chink got rid of his drinks in another way. He was quite sober.

It wasn't long before Heavy Windover was enticed—though he didn't know he was being enticed—into a room in Doyers Street; there, as he believed, to get more drink. He got more drink. He had a confused, jumbled idea that Bagg the Chink sat opposite him, and that now and then a withered Chinese floated about the room like a dry leaf blown on autumn winds. He shut one eye tightly, and discerned a bed in a far corner. He didn't know exactly where he was—and didn't care much. Then he gently faded out of events, with a great fanfare of trumpeting snores.

He lay on the bed, to which Bagg the Chink and Ming Yuen had dragged him. His right arm hung, limp, over the edge of the bed. Now and then the huge fingers brushed the floor as the sleeper stirred. Soon he ceased to stir at all. His snoring ceased, and he breathed only lightly—just enough to keep body and soul together. There was something else besides the liquor in the man. No drunken man ever lay so quietly—on the very brink of suspended animation.

Bagg the Chink stared at the sleeper. He was smitten with pity—fear; something he couldn't fathom. He had no affection for the man on the bed, but something deep down revolted against his conspiring with the withered yellow alien to work harm against a brother white man. Bagg couldn't have explained this in so many words—but that is what it was; it couldn't be anything else. He watched Ming Yuen draw a chair to the bedside.

He watched him lift the huge arm of Heavy Windover and lay the forearm across his pantalooned legs.

He saw that the palm of the burglar's hand was upward, and that the fingers curled slightly. He saw Ming Yuen take a small instrument from some hidden pocket in his strange clothing. He saw a vial full of greenish fluid on the floor beside the chair of Ming Yuen. A wad of absorbent cotton and a small roll of gauze bandage were there, too. Bagg the Chink shuddered—but he made no protest. Things had gone too far now.

Ming Yuen accomplished his purpose quickly. As the blade sank into the flesh of the wrist, there was only a slight tremor of the body to signify that the nervous system had been touched. The operation was not of the sort to arouse the deadened brain. So deftly did the Chinese work that the arteries in the wrist were not touched. The flow of blood was quickly stanchd, a heavy bandage applied—and the wounded arm restored to a comfortable position.

"You get one thousand dolla'," said Ming Yuen to Bagg the Chink, as he left him alone with the sleeping burglar. "Me get nothing. Me work for fiend."

Broad daylight, a sickly gray through the dusty windows, had come when Heavy Windover awakened. He was very sick. He discovered the bandage at once. His whole arm ached.

"How'd I get this?" he asked Bagg the Chink, whom he aroused from sleep in a chair at the table.

"How'd you get it?" repeated Bagg. He had learned his lesson well. "Don't you remember havin' a fight up here—and that big fellow drivin' at you with a knife?"

"No. Tell me about it—and make it short."

"There was a guy up here drinkin', and you and him got into a jam. He pulled a 'shiv' on you, but you knocked him over before he could hurt you much. He nicked you on the wrist."

"Did I get him?"

"You only beat him up and throwed him down-stairs—that's all!"

"Am I cut bad?"

"No—not bad."

Heavy was satisfied. He didn't even remember entering that room—let alone what happened subsequently. He was rather proud of the fact that he had whipped the man with the knife.

Six months later, Heavy Windover, driven by dire necessity, shuffled into the shop of Nicholas Feld. He had the dirty gray color of a man who had been hitting the bumps of life—and his clothing showed it, too. His right arm hung at his side. Nicholas Feld observed that the hand—the hand which had inflicted the ferocious slap—was gnarled and twisted. The fingers were rigid and curled like the claw of an eagle that had died fighting.

"Nick," said Heavy, in the dull, dogged voice of a man brought down to distasteful things, "you and me never got along very well—but I'm up against it; I need help—and I don't know where else to go."

Nicholas Feld could not keep his eyes off the hand. He inquired: "What is it that you think I should do for you?"

"I need money—not much. I ain't been able to work since this mitt went flooey on me." He flung his arm upward and the useless hand lay on the showcase. The shopkeeper feasted his eyes upon the flesh that had once been so strong and which now was so pitifully helpless. "I'm goin' to work next week," Heavy went on. "Me and Jersey Mapes are goin' to drag down on a 'job' that don't take much strength, and—"

"What should be the matter with your hand?"

"You know what's the matter with my hand," Heavy replied with a trace of anger. "All the boys know what's the matter with it. You know I got in a fight—"

"And it will never be no good again?"

"No. The doctor says the cord in the wrist was cut—and he couldn't see how—"

"And it never will be no good again, eh?"

Heavy Windover thought Nicholas Feld smiled. He looked sharply at the shopkeeper, and saw that he *did* smile. The burglar felt somehow—he didn't know how—that Nicholas Feld was gloating. Rage overpowered him.

When the police came they found Heavy Windover astride the prostrate form of the shopkeeper. With the good left hand the burglar clutched his throat; and furiously beat the cheeks of Nicholas Feld with the twisted hand.

The glass was broken out of the showcase. Both men were crying in a ferocious rage. At times Nicholas Feld wrenched the hand of the burglar away from his throat—pouring out a stream of fierce invective.

They dragged Heavy Windover away and locked him up. He had long been wanted.

What had an honest shopkeeper to do with so notorious a burglar as Heavy Windover? The question was no more than asked than the police set out to find the answer.

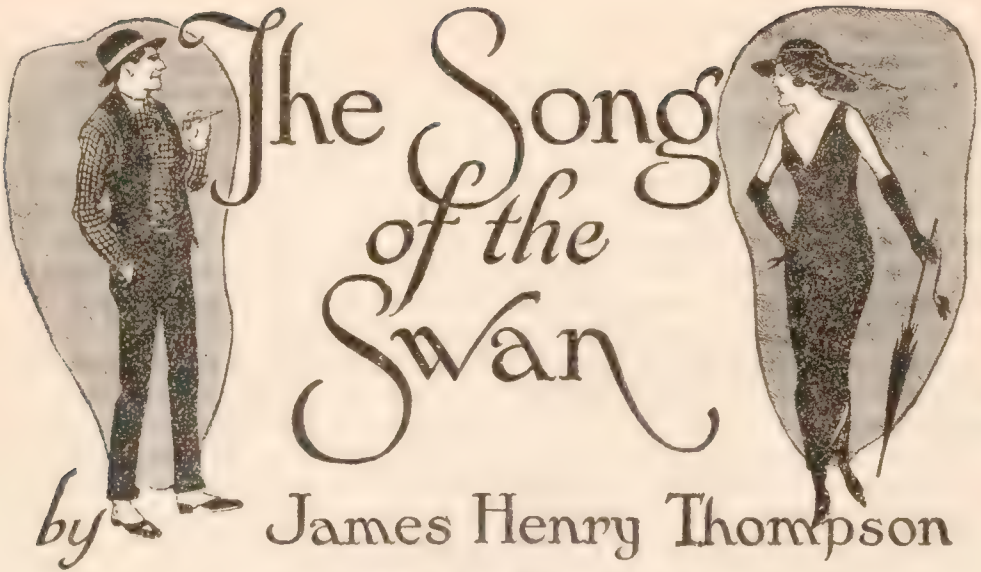
Bit by bit they uncovered Nicholas Feld's manner of life and livelihood. They uncovered his mysterious route—and took in a choice collection of assorted crooks. Among them was Nicholas Feld. Among them were Ming Yuen and Bagg the Chink.

It is doubtful whether the warden upriver knew that the carload of newcomers he received one morning were started on their journey by a slap in the face.

POPPY-FLAME

A FLASH of crimson poppies;
 A flame of poppy gold,
 A far faint note from a bronze bird's throat,
 And from its shroudings cold,
 A love I thought lay buried,
 Arose and called my name.
 Yes, called aloud, from its grave-damp shroud,
 At flash of poppy-flame.

Cora Lapham Hazard.



The Song of the Swan

by James Henry Thompson

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPARROW.

LIKE two half-nude caryatides the life-size poster likenesses of Juno the Perfect Woman flanked the entrance to the burlesque theater. Flamboyantly immodest, highly colored, they advertised the physical perfections of their original in type and picture. Between them at hours of performances passed long lines of lewd-eyed men, eager for a glimpse of the beauty offered to their view, while a gratified manager of the show rubbed his hands in self-congratulation that he had been shrewd enough to devise this exploitation of feminine charms to pander so successfully to human lusts.

The posters were but part of the advertising campaign that bruited forth the perfections of Juno and shared them with whomsoever purchased admission. Smaller cards diagrammed the woman's form, and carried, in imposingly erudite display, a comparison of her measurements with those of classic models of bodily symmetry, together with a crass invitation to contrast with the dimensions of modern women.

In newspapers and on programs Juno enjoyed the high-sounding title of prima donna of her company. Nominally, at least, she was accorded much honor in the

ribald entertainment that she graced. Hers were the titular perquisites of a star, and to her accrued whatever dignity might come from lavish publicity of her name and features.

Juno had risen to the pinnacle of her chosen form of art.

Once there had been born, unwelcomed and unloved, into the already large family of one Twister Morgan a woman-child. Fortunately, the babe had been unaware of the paternal curses and the maternal apathy that greeted her arrival, else she might have succumbed to discouragement. Some grudging obedience to conventions allowed her a name, and without benefit of clergy, she was christened Polly.

Twister Morgan, who gained his living by precarious and picaresque ways, had too little time from his own devious affairs to give the new daughter more than a passing attention. His drab and spiritless wife was compelled by interests of motherhood to extend slightly more care to her offspring. So, soon as an early weaning process was painfully completed, Polly was turned over to the ungentle and uncertain care of an elder sister, and parental solicitude for her ceased.

She thrived, as all things thrive that are compelled to cope with great adversity, and

learned quickly and well the technique of the struggle that leads to the survival of the fittest. That she did survive is eloquent testimonial to her basic strength and fitness to live.

Some time during her childhood an officious and interfering city had compelled her to acquire a rudimentary knowledge of letters, and this she supplemented with a much more practical and interesting course of study in the eclectic curriculum of the streets. She became adept in the school of ungente manners that teaches its pupils self-protection and defensive selfishness and that replaces the Golden Rule with a more useful axiom that the Lord looks after them that look after themselves.

At fifteen Polly Morgan was a capable young virgin, her lamps always well filled with the oil of expediency. She was robust of body and of mind; sufficient unto herself in all her emprises, and fairly ready to be graduated *cum laude* from the finishing-school of the city's jungle. Whether Polly was destined to finish or be finished in a later school was a gamble, with the odds slightly in favor of Polly.

At this time Twister Morgan and his befuddled wife had probably pretty well forgotten the existence of Polly. The constant and distressing recurrence of the phenomenon of birth kept them so occupied with infant dependents that they had no time for elder progeny. Any addition to the family was merely a passing incident. All that Twister Morgan ever gave his children in the way of patrimony was a name, and a right to live if they could. His responsibilities ceased there.

So Polly Morgan became a roving comet, unfixed to any orbit. Where other satellites revolve about the axis of home, she was held by no attraction more stable than her own varying and none-too-sweet will.

At that age when maidens are supposed to step with trembling and discreet feet across the division line that separates girlhood from womanhood there was no hesitant flutter observable in the stride that Polly took. She stepped early, eagerly, and perforce across the line, and landed plump into the liabilities and assets of maturity. The incurrence of these *onusa* implied a

necessity. She must find a means to maintain the plumpness of her body and the freedom of her spirit.

The unethical and unmoral creed by which she had hitherto existed was no trammel to her now. Likewise she was under no handicap of ambition in making choice of the means by which she would meet and give battle to fortune. In her choice of terms imposed by the primal curse she was entirely dominated by circumstances.

Inherent feminine instincts sent Polly forth in search of light and warmth and such luxury of indolence as has become the predestined right of womankind since men have hoarded them in harems and homes. It was inevitable that she should find a qualified luxury where she might.

That there was an element of hazard in this undictated and undirected course did not occur to Polly. Whatever ends might come to her entirely overbalanced and made insignificant the means. A guardian and protective Providence was unguessed in her estimate of life.

Polly Morgan was no object of pity: she was scornful of any attempt at sympathy with her, independent of any efforts to assist her. By unanimous consent of the Morgan family she had early been dubbed a brat, and brat she remained. She was as wilful, impertinent, unconstrained, autonomous, and defiant as one of the sparrows that shared the streets with her. She asked and gave no quarter nor odds in her battle with life.

It was unavoidable that Polly should have formed some acquaintances. These had been chosen with a rare disregard of anything except expediency. She swore no fealty, owed no loyalty, knew no allegiance, wasted no affection. She was an individualist in highest degree.

She passed back and forth, in and out of the life around her, ragged, none too clean, jauntily impertinent, ogling male passers-by, and flaunting her ill-hanging skirts in scornful defiance of dangers and proprieties.

Sometimes the girl's instinct for luxury had taken her perilously near to disaster, but another instinct had invariably saved her. She was saucily pretty; voluptuous

enough to become fair quarry for male hunters; but she had shrewdly estimated that some lives are not long lives, and she had a great eagerness to live.

If there was any mitigating morality in Polly's unmoral code it was inspired purely by expediency—nothing else.

Came, then, the random circumstance that was to direct Polly's wandering footsteps.

While she was rambling without objective one early summer's evening, enjoying the fresh warmth of the air and the blatant excitement of the huddled crowd, she was accosted by a male not catalogued in her list of associates. He greeted her with the traditional informality of his kind:

"'Lo, kid!"

The mere fact that he had saluted her was sufficient acknowledgment of his interest, and passed current for an introduction to further parleys. Polly replied with an impertinent glance:

"'Lo, yourself!"

Her response was indication that she was willing to listen to overtures from the man, and those he supplied with a question:

"Where y' goin', kid?"

"Nowheres," answered Polly, in perfect truthfulness.

"So'm I; c'm on," invited the male.

She accepted the invitation by the simple expedient of falling into step beside the stranger. He led her along the streets with certainty of direction, and their progress was little undisturbed by conversation. Once he remarked frankly and sincerely:

"I like y'r looks, kid."

To which flattery Polly replied with a noncommittal: "Yeh?"

The experience of thus casting herself heedlessly upon the tides of fortune was not new to Polly, and she had implicit reliance in her ability to weather safely whatever storms she might be steered into.

"My name's Tom Lester," ventured her escort.

"Mine's Polly Morgan," confided his companion, in fair give and take.

Tom disclosed the objective of his guidance when he reached the portals of a tawdry but brightly lighted place of entertainment whose flashing sign labeled it the

Rose Garden, but which was more familiarly known in its neighborhood as Cravelli's Cabaret. Into this gilded hall he escorted Polly.

Because he does not figure long either in the life of Polly or in this tale, Tom deserves a passing descriptive paragraph here.

Search for a simile by which his character may be measured and made graphic leads to comparison with a hawk. Not a bold, filibustering chicken-hawk that sweeps bravely from dizzy heights into a brood, nor yet a powerfully soaring fish-hawk that dives unafraid into a strange element for its prey.

Tom was like a sleek, slender falcon, hooded, jossed, belled, and leashed by an owner. Tom did not hunt in decent and lawful desire to satisfy his own needs; but brought to earth and to another's feet the quarry that was to be snatched from him. He was entered at the game from some other volition than his own.

Like a hawk's were his hard eyes, wrinkled at the corners from much suspicious peering, and like a hawk's was the hard-set curve of his thin lips. He, too, was a product of the same environment that had given Polly her competency. It is part of this education that the sexes shall be at eternal war, and that one shall always be fair prey for the other. No truce has ever been signed in this conflict; no treaty provides the rules of the game. In Tom's code a man might live from a woman's shame and suffer no qualms of conscience; in Polly's creed a woman might wring from a man by whatever wiles she may any or all of his strength or means, and still play fair.

So Tom and Polly were evenly matched when they seated themselves at one of the damp and iron-legged tables of the Rose Garden and ordered their beer underneath the faded paper flowers that bedecked that bower. Polly was handicapped by the necessity that drove her to seek some steady course of income; Tom was under handicap of a too ardent and selfish regard for Polly's charms.

Here was the making of a romance; but romance has no place in the lives of these sort of Pollies and Toms.

"What's y'r job, kid?" subtly inquired Tom.

"Slingin' hash," wisely replied Polly, retreating behind a falsehood because she sensed that confession of unemployment would weaken her defenses.

"That's no job f'r a girl like you! Why don't y' get wise t' y'rself?" queried Tom, sparring for an opening.

"What d' y' mean, get wise?" probed Polly, alert for advantage.

"Why, a kid with a shape like you got don't have to sling hash!"

Polly thought she had detected the purpose of this opponent.

"Nix on that line, kiddo! I'm wise to that line of bunk!" she retorted, a stern warning in her voice.

"Y' get me wrong there, kid; I ain't no cadet," exclaimed Tom, eager to avert suspicion.

"Well, shoot then; what is y'r big graft?" inquired the mollified girl.

"Get in the chorus!"

"What chorus?" questioned Polly, curious for details.

"Burlesque," answered Tom. "They're lookin' f'r Janes like you—classy face an' shape—an' they's easy twenty a week in it, 'sides what y' can nick the Johns for."

"What d' y' have to do?" pursued Polly, entirely unfamiliar with the qualifications of a chorus girl.

"Aw, sing an' dance a little, but mostly just look good."

"I can't sing or dance," objected Polly, thereby indicating that Tom's proposal carried some appeal.

"Y' don't have to—much," argued Tom. "With y'r shape y' can get away with murder! They'll teach y' all the steps y' need, an' y'r looks 'll get y' by easy."

"Sounds reasonable," skeptically remarked Polly, slight sarcasm in her tones.

Tom was so surprised and delighted that he had discovered so willing a proselyte that he ordered more beer and solicitously inquired if Polly would not like a sandwich. The latter invitation was redundant in form, for Polly could not remember when she did not want a sandwich.

The lure of luxury was upon the girl. Under Tom's adroit direction she envisioned

the pampered life of the folk of the stage, and leaped to the bait that was dangled before her. The future seemed all at once free from care and vexatious problems concerned with food and warmth. She left Tom that night under promise to meet him the following day, to be escorted to the office of a theatrical agent, where she might obtain employment.

Seafaring men are versed in the customs of these employment agents known as "crimps," and sailors have a well-founded fear of the ungentle process known as "shanghaiing," when a potent and stupefying drop in their glass means unknown ships and unmerciful masters. They avoid these except under propulsion of sternest necessity. Had Polly been aware of these practices she might have sensed an analogy in her situation and drank less willingly of the benumbing verbal potion that Tom served her.

The next day he led his quarry to the office of his master, the agent who furnished girls for the choruses of the shows that operated on a burlesque wheel. There, after much indelicate exhibition of her nether limbs and much probing of her soft body by the pursy fingers of the agent, she was accepted and told to report at once at a rehearsal hall.

Then followed hot and sweaty days of rehearsal while Polly, with her companions of the chorus, labored through awkward drills and dance figures in the minimum of clothes, responding sullenly to the profane urgings of an irascible stage director.

The doughty independence that Polly had learned in the streets stood her in good stead now while she combatted the petty jealousies and meannesses of the other girls. They were jealous of no superior talent, of no mental graces: the only standard of success in their sordid world was fixed by bodily perfections.

Polly was their equal, at least in rudeness, and by the time the show was ready to take to the road for its opening date and automatically start her salary, she had been accepted as a show girl whose resources made her a valuable friend and a dangerous enemy.

Without the formality of explanatory

farewells, she packed her small belongings and departed the vicinity that she had flattered by the name of home.

Thenceforth Polly Morgan's calendar was in terms of "openings of the season," "jumps," and "stands."

CHAPTER II.

THE TOPMOST RUNG.

THERE was no latent talent to be discovered in Polly. She did her chorus work diligently, mechanically, without originality or ambition, with much faithfulness; and with her sisters was useful much as the scenery and stage settings were useful to give a brilliant background to the crude art of the show.

She made no attempts to improve her position in any way, and it is doubtful if she was ever jealous of a place of honor in the front row. She was apathetically content with the unusual independence of her new occupation and the freedom from restraint she now enjoyed.

Polly was no more moral nor no less so than others of the girls with the show. The old code of expediency prevailed in her new life, as it had in the old. The same old battle of wits and passions, the same old conflict of the sexes, continued—unmoral and unfeeling. The luxury she had anticipated found expression in late and lazy hours in the beds of cheap hotels, and late and lascivious hours at the tables of cheap cafés. Her desires for warmth and light and pleasure found easy gratification.

She early learned the tricks that chorus girls know: how to gain from a John the maximum of profit at a minimum of expense; how always to inject a third and precautionary member into any dinner or drinking bout; how to parry and foil the wiles of designing males; how to accept members of the "profession" on a different plane from others; how to be alertly suspicious of every new acquaintance, and how to conserve her meager pay and invest it in "hock-shop" diamonds and other securities that might be negotiated in times of need quickly and without embarrassment.

Polly was a creature of the moment—as careless of the future as the ephemeral flies that take wing and live and perform their purpose in a brief span of fitful flight. She had learned that too much thought was distressing, so she ceased to give it further consideration.

Life must progress or retrogress—there is no such thing as stagnation. Nature had planned a course for Polly Morgan, and if her mind was indifferent to ambition, then other attributes must be the motive power to drive her up or down the natural scale. It was inescapable that she should not remain fixed.

Sometimes Nature blesses her children with her endowment of physical beauties; sometimes she damns them with the same gift. Beauty may be an asset or a liability according as it finds environment.

Polly was possessed of this equivocal gift of beauty. Hers was a sensuous pulchritude unassociated with graces of mind or manners. The lithe perfections of her body and the petulant prettiness of her face were attractions that compelled admiration—dangerous and menacing admiration. She regarded her charms merely as weapons with which she had been girded for the warfare of self-preservation that she was continually engaged in.

In the burlesque business such charms as Polly was possessed of are aids to fortune that serve instead of the talent or ability that drives to fame in other arts. The Paphian devotees of burlesque demand their beauty in the flesh or in fleshings. Their tastes have put a managerial premium on sensuality. Artistic deficiencies have long since been overweighted by physical potency.

So it came that despite Polly Morgan's indifference to ambition, she was chosen for prominence, and at the end of her first season as a chorus girl had become one of those envied and erotic ornaments for which there was much spirited competition among the men who pick and choose the bodily stage settings for their shows.

"You for the front row!" announced the show manager as he inspected Polly's charms with bold eyes in the insecure privacy of her dressing-room.

"All right," assented Polly, unconcernedly omitting any thanks for her promotion.

It was inevitable that male admirers should seek monopoly of Polly's fascinations. They came and went without leaving any visible impress on her life. She accepted and frankly sought male companions much as the other girls of the chorus did, always as a part of her program of expediency. On the credit side of her accounts she wrote down the dinners and small gifts she extracted from the men who met her at the stage door, and who paid willingly until they discovered the futility of their campaigns; the debit side of the ledger she left blank, for she paid nothing in return except the grace of her presence.

These acquaintances were brief and soon forgotten. It was unlikely that any one man should twice seek her company. In her confused estimate of human relations possible sincerity of affections counted for naught. She could conceive of no love that was not selfish, and a lover who came proffering his tenderness in all good honor was classed with her potential enemies, much as they who came with robber hands.

Polly's heart was unstirred either by passion or inclination. She was an anomaly among women, possessing all the requisites to win high regard for herself, but carelessly spurning that regard.

During her second season in the chorus a sudden shift in road managers of the only moderately successful show she was with sent Max Weisbaum to the helm of that theatrical craft. Max was an opportunist, vulpine, arrogant, selfish, concerned only in the welfare of two orders, primarily his own, and secondly, that of his employers. He combined to a remarkable degree the qualifications of a successful burlesque executive.

The day that Max joined the show he was keenly alert for opportunities. His mind was receptive to suggestions, and he was determined to make a record that would gain for him prestige with his employers. He was also overwatchful for some adventitious happening that might allow him to better his private fortunes. Max was constantly on the trail of the main chance.

3 ARGOSY

Then Max saw Polly.

Much as Botticelli saw Simonetta and estimated her procreant charms, so Max, from equally artistic motives, weighed and accepted to his uses the rare curves of Polly.

His beady eyes opened wide, then narrowed to speculative slits. His full-lipped mouth pursed to emit an admiring whistle.

"Who's the Jane with the shape in the front row?" he asked of the stage carpenter.

The carpenter returned an answering identification and threw in the gratuitous information that Max might better waste his time in some other quarter than to attempt to penetrate the chill armor of Polly's capable aloofness.

"Some shape!" exclaimed the new agent. Then he walked over to the object of his admiration, confident from past experiences that his reception would be cordial. The friendship of a manager is a very desirable addition to a chorus girl's assets.

"Lo, kid," he said. "I'm your new daddy. Goin' t' be nice t' y'r papa, ain't y'?"

The abruptness of his approach and his assumption of impropriation held no novelty for Polly. She had met managers before. Positions and rank held no awe for her.

"Pickin' kind o' soon, ain't y'?" she coolly replied, thus interpreting the manager's intention and disarming him of any subtlety with one question. "Y' better shop round a little," she continued; "they's other 'll suit y'r style better 'n me. And I've heard folks say before they liked my looks, so y' needn't waste breath, 'cause I guess y'r line of talk's limited to just about that kind of a remark."

"Gawd! You're hard, ain't you?" sneered Max. "One of them wise ones! Well, y're too previous, altogether. Maybe I can show you where it 'll pay y' t' be nice t' me. What about it then? I got a big idea, an' y're part of it."

"Talk business and you'll interest me. Spill what y' got on y'r mind, an' make it quick and worth listenin' to," said Polly with a slight shade of interest.

"D' y' treat 'em all as hard as that?" insultingly laughed Max.

"All alike, an' y'r no better 'n the rest."

"All right, then; I'll see y' after the show, an' we'll talk business," arranged the manager, forsaking his original tactics.

"Dinner?" queried Polly. "'Cause I got another John waitin' that's a sure-fire meal-ticket."

"Aw, yeh, I s'pose so," grudgingly assented Max, and turned to shout an imperious reprimand to another girl: "Here, you red-head, stand up! Don't y' know they's a rule 'gainst sittin' down in tights!"

That night over a dinner that Polly's lavish ordering made an expensive thorn in Max's canny side was born Juno, the Perfect Woman.

Not without further and ineffectual efforts to obtain her for his own incestuous ends, Max unfolded to Polly his scheme that was shrewdly contrived to satisfy both their selfish desires and to impress the owners of the show with the value of the new manager.

When he had determined that Polly offered no food for his personal lusts, he turned to frank discussion of his scheme:

"The show needs pep. That's why they sent me on to run it. It's got to make a better showin' on the statements, an' it's up to me to make it. No life in it. Folks want pep—something that 'll just get by the censors. That prim we got now is a dead one. Wears too many skirts. Can't be done. Folks don't want singin'; they want shape."

Polly was in the business long enough to feel nothing indelicate in this commercial rating of body. She was only eager to learn where the discussion concerned her.

"Yeh! But what's all that got to do with me?" she impatiently interrupted.

"I'm comin' to that," replied Max. "Now you got the shape an' the looks an' everything to put pep into this show. Y' ain't shy of tights, an', believe me! They'll sit up an' take notice if you get into the right wardrobe an' show 'em plenty o'—"

"Y' mean y' want me to be prim?" gasped Polly, for once startled into an admission of amazement.

"Y' got me! I'll make y' the biggest sensation on the wheel! A riot!"

"But I can't sing, an' I don't know much

'bout dancin', an' I ain't got no wardrobe, an'—"

Max checked her enumeration of disqualifications:

"That ain't got nothin' to do with what I got planned. I been in this game long 'nough to know what they want. Shape's what they want, an' *you got it!* When you lead a drill in white tights they won't be nothin' to it! A riot, that's all!"

"What 'bout the old prim?" asked Polly, partially assenting to the scheme.

"Aw, we'll let her ride out her contract t' the end o' the season. 'I'll bill you as an extra added attraction till then."

"What's they in it f'r me?"

"Fifty per this season, and wardrobe. More next," estimated Max, experimentally.

"I'll go y'," agreed Polly.

The compact was completed with a succinct "Good!" from the manager, and he proceeded to details of his proposed conquest of the burlesque world.

"Now I been readin' up since I got my lamps on you, an' I got a name an' everything picked out f'r y'. Polly Morgan ain't flashy 'nough; no class to it. Now once they was a Jane lived that was some queen for shape. They called her Juno. So I'm goin' t' bill you as Juno the Perfect Woman. Sounds kind o' highbrow, an' I can get away with a lot o' good press stuff 'bout it. Compare y'r measurements an' everything. I got a picture of her here."

Polly studied the print. "Gawd! She must 'a' lived where 'twas warm! No clothes at all!"

"Yeh, y' got to go back to them old-timers to get pep," calmly asseverated Max.

"Y' can't get by dressin' a part like that," objected Polly.

"Well, o' course, we may have t' drape a little more."

"What was this queen's game?"

"I'm comin' t' that. They's a reg'lar little act 'bout her that we can dope out f'r a grand histor'cal tab-loo. Flash stuff with lots o' poses. Livin'-picture stuff, only all new. Dimmers on f'r the act till you come in; then the spot. Classy stuff!"

"Sounds good!" complimented Polly.

"Now this Jane, Juno, she got in a battle with two other skirts 'bout which was

the most beautiful, an' they lef' it to a guy named Paris to decide."

"That's a town," corrected Polly.

"This guy Paris," went on Max, disregarding her interruption, "went an' gave the prize t' one of the other Janes 'cause she promised him a swell wife; but we got t' change that a little an' dope it out so's you get the medal."

"Sure," complacently admitted Polly.

"'Stead o' only three dames to pick from we'll have the whole chorus in tights, an' posin', an' let this guy Paris judge 'em all. Maybe we'll let the audience pick a winner by applause."

"Not the skinny ones," objected the goddess-elect.

"Naw; we'll pick some new girls that 'll show up good. Just one skinny one f'r comedy."

"Some picture!" mused the new-born Juno.

"Some picture's right! Lots o' pep, an' then you'll come in in draperies an' throw 'em off an' reveal the Perfect Woman. Some pep! It 'll be a riot!" And Max rubbed his fat hands in self-gratification.

"Do I have t' sing?" anxiously inquired Polly.

"Aw, just maybe one 'r two talkin' numbers just t' lead the chorus."

"Well, I'll try it. Anything once 's my motto."

"I'll order the full-sheets an' costumes t'-morrow. You be ready early to get out to a photographer's."

Without volition, without ambition, unquestioning the future, and utterly reliant upon her gift of beauty, Polly Morgan thus climbed the theatrical ladder from lowest rung to peak in one careless step. The same fate that had picked her from the streets and sent her to be the quarry of Tom Lester's falcon-questing promoted her again. Her code of expediency knew no qualms; her indifference to spiritual progress interposed no objections.

Max Weisbaum was well pleased when he left her. He saw in her the means to further his ambitions, and in her inappetence he recognized the characteristic that would allow him free rein in future traffic with her as his stock in trade. He chose

her for his purpose exactly as he selected the stage trappings for his new act, and with as much care.

Soon the caryatidelike posters of Juno the Perfect Woman began to flank the entrances to burlesque theaters.

CHAPTER III.

THE SINGLE GIFT.

JUNO the Perfect Woman was a success. Weisbaum craftily accomplished in the picture of which Juno was the central figure just the right admixture of classicity and carnality. He shrewdly guessed that under the guise of art he could go to lengths forbidden to less esthetic showmen—and he went the limit. His version of the judgment of Paris, if inaccurate in details, was lavish in voluptuousness, and the show prospered because of the decadent attraction.

Juno consumed the bulk of Max's advertising allotment, and from hoardings and newspaper columns her praises and perfections were forced upon the public. The attention paid the nominal prima donna of the show was slight in comparison, and that indignantly jealous lady made haste to forsake the field in great pique and much strong language, to the complete satisfaction of the manager.

Juno remained in possession of the domain of the star. With her accession of the title of prima donna more duties developed upon her, and she was compelled to aid to her posing several song numbers, crude attempts in which she learned to speak rather than sing, and smirk her way to applause that in no justice could have been evoked by her vocal talents.

With the birth of Juno there died the old Polly Morgan. She discarded some of her old characteristics as easily as she did her old name. True, the new creature who sold her beauty for indiscriminate masculine delight retained some of the traits that Polly Morgan had known—her code of expediency, for instance; but she built a new character that doffed the sullen subordination of the chorus girl and donned the haughty arrogance that becomes a prima donna. "She's gettin' 'way up-stage," was

the condemnatory and envious verdict of her former mates of the chorus.

With her new dignity of position came a new class of admirers—men with money to spend and eager to spend it upon so showy a thing as she; men whose taste in companions was like their taste in jewels, and ran to gaudy ostentation. In consequence of these the luxury of Juno's life became almost superlative. She took unthinkingly to the intemperate vices of the life, and joined gayly in dissipation—down to a certain point.

She had an inflexible rule of morals to which she adhered.

To her work on the stage she remained indifferent no longer. She had an animal pride in her prominence, and the constant emphasis on her name and features flattered her vanity pleasingly. She took an immense care of her body, nursing and pampering it with great variety of lotions, unguents, cosmetics, and whatever nostrums were advertised to catch her fancy. Juno appreciated that in her beauty lay her self-preservation, and she was sometimes pitifully and selfishly eager lest it fade and leave her shorn of her total resources.

Juno was egregiously concerned with her own affairs. Whatever others gained from contact with her they purchased—she never gave. There was no sympathy between her and her quondam mates of the chorus; she expended no affection on anything but herself. Were there a way of piercing her armor, none had found it; but all who knew her were certain that her reserve was only superficial, and that some time, somewhere, would come the one whose heat would thaw her ice. This superstition kept her supplied with admirers.

Her selfishness found expression these days in personal adornments—diamonds and gewgaws that clashed vulgarly with her beauty.

The constant accent upon her prominence was certain to have its effect. She was keen-witted enough to know there was little basis for this prominence except in her bodily charms, and she was shrewd enough to guess that were other talents combined with her beauty she could rise to still greater heights and consequent gratification.

She began to feel an ambition, and with it came a sense of obligation to fulfil the exaggerated descriptions of her accomplishments.

To Max Weisbaum, to whom she bore no debt of gratitude because she was confident his own ends had been served well by their partnership, and because she labored under no delusions that she was anything but a piece of furniture to him, she confided once:

"Max, I wish sometimes I could sing. It ain't right that a prima donna shouldn't sing. Gawd! If I could only warble a little I'd make 'em sit up an' take notice! It ain't nothin' but my legs gets me over now! I want to do something else!"

The signs of discontent alarmed the manager, and he replied:

"Aw, hell! You *are* gettin' over! What more d' y' want? Ain't y' the biggest hit on the wheel? They don't want singin', I tell you; they want shape."

"But, Max, if I had 'em both together, they wouldn't be nothin' to it, would they?"

"It can't be done, kiddo. If your voice's good they forget your shape, an' if your shape's good they forget your voice. Y' ought t' be thankful y' got at least a shape. Forget it!"

But Juno did not forget. The desire to sing obsessed her. Her vocal shortcomings were painful, distressing. She honestly tried to utter the syncopated numbers assigned to her with some sort of melodic appeal, but failed miserably, and resorted to her expedient of speaking the lyrics. She never appeared now that she did not feel herself a sciolist, foisting upon her public a false pretense.

So persistent became her ambition that her temper was even less gracious that had been its unkind wont. She sacrificed to her desire many of her petty vices—smoking and late carousings—in vain efforts to improve her voice.

When the show was playing its engagements in New York Juno was attracted by an advertisement of a Sunday concert that had for its stellar feature a famous prima donna of operatic fame. The burlesque "prim," hazy in her ideas of the functions of a prima donna, purchased

tickets and attended the concert. Her inherent appreciation of music was stirred by the great voice, and she sat in rapt and ecstatic misery while the famous cantatripe sang. Her first bitter envy was obliterated by an intense yearning. It was probably her first hearing of good music.

That night she sought out her manager.

"Say, Max, I ain't a reg'lar prima donna, am I?" she inquired.

"Sure, y'r reg'lar. What d' y' mean, reg'lar?" answered the puzzled Max.

"Lay off the kid stuff, an' give it to me straight, Max. I just found out to-day. A reg'lar prima donna wears skirts an' sings. She don't have t' get by on her shape."

"Nix! Nix! Nix!" admonished the alarmed manager. "Don't you get the idea in y'r bean that y' want t' wear skirts. That 'd queer the whole game!"

"I don't care so much 'bout the skirts as I do 'bout singin'," complained Juno.

"Aw, forget it!" was Max's advice.

Juno haunted Sunday concerts during her engagements in the larger cities. She evinced a surprising appreciation of classical music, and found in it a great delight; but she tormented her spirit with a vain yearning to interpret such music herself.

One of the chorus numbers that she was called to lead in the show was dressed in scant conceptions of Scottish costumes, and for the number Juno attempted a recitative interpretation of "Annie Laurie." After she had heard a famous singer render that poignant melody she persuaded Max to change it for a less musical Highland fling.

At the end of the season, when came a few brief weeks between the closing show and rehearsals for a new one, Juno remained in the city, economically living in a cheap, hot room, foregoing opportunities to luxuriate at cooler resorts, and immolating herself upon the altar of her desire.

She sought out a famous and expensive vocal instructor, and to him confided her ambition. Not without much pride, she told him of her fame, and winced when he openly sneered at her burlesque prominence. Her greatness was laid open to further doubts. However, the singing-teacher accepted her money, her savings of a season, and allotted her to instruction periods.

At the end of a fortnight's struggle with her vocal inadequacies, during which time she laboriously and faithfully performed the simple and rudimentary exercises he prescribed, he gave up in despair and bluntly and unfeelingly told her the truth:

"You have no more voice than a crow, and never will have. God distributes His gifts wisely and well. To you He has given beauty—and little else. Maybe it is for some great purpose. You are very much like the swan—a very beautiful bird, but with no voice for song."

Juno took her defeat then with no outward expression of chagrin. "Yeh, Max Weisbaum told me something like that," she replied to the instructor, and took her way to the privacy of her sweating room, where she could give vent to feminine tears—tears that were full of rage, vengeful, arrogant, defiant, and selfish.

If ambition was killed, Juno clung to the bitter thought that she was even more a fraud, and appeased her misgivings in part by compelling Max to cancel the use of her appellation of prima donna. She now appeared on programs and billings simply as Juno the Perfect Woman.

Life's greatest tragedy lies in failure to express life's greatest desire. With the futility of effort God tries human souls; sometimes they emerge from the ordeal newly strengthened, and sometimes they come forth reculant and rebellious.

Juno's trial by disappointment left her strangely perplexed after the first defeat of her wilful life. She was unused to adversity as a conqueror and too little versed in homiletics to adopt any spiritual lesson from her bursted bubble. The imps of ambition played high comedy before her wounded soul. Her repinings tortured her, and their futility enraged her.

Like a straining runner—every ounce of pressure on his bursting lungs, every pound of tension on his aching muscles, who sees his competitor slowly, surely, relentlessly, inch by inch, outdistancing him; who acutely realizes that, strain and strain and strive and pant as he will, until the channels of the blood stand forth to bursting, and the leathern lungs crowd for room, there is never another bit of speed to be gained—

she knew the inexorable horror of repulse. She was not a graceful loser.

Creature of externals that she was, it was unavoidable that her worry should be reflected in her body. She felt a revulsion against the soft and shapely flesh that had led her to this thwarted hope; she resented the gift of beauty that had robbed her of another talent. She conceived that God gives of His gifts singly, and blazed in impious resentment. Like some fanatic flagellant, she made her flesh do penance for its offenses. The judgment of Paris no longer carried conviction.

Max Weisbaum was greatly concerned lest he lose Juno the Perfect Woman as a fleshly asset, just as she was bringing fame and fortune to him and his show.

CHAPTER IV.

A FALLEN IDOL.

IT was still early in the second season of her triumphs when the inescapable catastrophe overtook Juno.

Her once plump and rounded limbs were no longer plump; the petulant prettiness of her face was marred by lines of nervous morbidness; oftentimes a hollow and persistent cough disturbed the voluptuous delights of her mimic court. Occasionally an overbold critic indulged in sarcasm at the expense of the Perfect Woman.

Then, too, a newcomer to the chorus ranks and one chosen for the trio from which Paris selected the most delectable was constantly winning a greater share of appreciative applause than Juno.

Max Weisbaum was surlily fault-finding. He upbraided Juno repeatedly concerning the debt he conceived she owed him in return for his part in her genesis and generation. He was outspoken in his criticisms and threatening. He failed utterly to comprehend the causes of her waning charms.

"What's eatin' y'?" he complained. "Y're gettin' skinny an' y'r knees are lumpy. The new kid in the chorus has got y' beat for shape right now."

"Can I get some symmetricals?" pleaded Juno.

"Yeh. But y' can't pad y'r face. Y'

look like the wrath o' Gawd! Y' better massage that phiz an' rub some o' them wrinkles out. Y' ain't in love, are y'?"

"No, Max; nothing like that."

"Well, then, take a brace! Want me t' put y' in skirts like that reg'lar prima donna y' went bugs 'bout?"

"No, Max; that wouldn't do no good."

"An' that cough y' got! How 'd y' get that?"

"Maybe from bein' more 'n half undressed in these theaters, with drafts blowin' everywhere."

"Well, do something for it! It sounds like hell in the picture!"

"All right, Max; I'll try."

"Y' better do more 'n try, or I'll have to put a new Juno in y'r place, an' then it's back to the chorus for you. I done everything I can for y', but I ain't goin' t' let y' put the show on the bum."

"I got a contract, Max."

"Contract, hell! That was made to be broke! I'm tellin' y', y' got to take a brace, or it's the blue envelope for you!"

Then the manager launched into a scathing and profane denunciation of the ingratitude that was about to rob him of his most profitable creation. It ended in downright abuse. "A hell of a Perfect Woman you are!"

Juno halted his excoriation with something of her old-time hauteur:

"Lay off that line of talk, Max! It won't get y' nothing. I'll do the best I can; but I just don't seem to care any more."

"Y' better care if you want to ride on my tickets. I don't carry no dead ones with me," was the manager's parting warning.

Two weeks later while the company was making a long "jump" between mid-West "stands" Juno's malady reached a climax. She was tormented by fevers, racked by coughing, too ill to travel farther. Only some pharasaical charity had impelled Max Weisbaum to keep her with the show thus long.

Grudgingly and aggrieved, the manager took steps to care for her with the least trouble to himself. Because the seriousness of her condition became apparent during transportation between cities, and be-

cause of the immediate necessity, he located the nearest town that boasted a hospital, arranged to have the train halted there, and telegraphed to have an ambulance and doctor meet it.

At Reedbury, then, where the dingy little station was an index to the insignificance of the town, Juno was removed from the train and loaded into an ambulance. Fortunately she was insensible to the unconcerned farewells from Max and his company. The manager climbed back aboard the train after some gruff instructions to the doctor, which consisted of the advice that the "Jane had enough kale to pay her way for a while," and impatiently sought out the shapely chorus girl to apprise her that thereafter she was to be Juno the Perfect Woman.

The chiming clangor of engine-bell and ambulance-gong was the recession to which the original Juno departed from the life of her lost desires.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW BIRTH.

IT was a long and trying illness through which Juno passed. The superb body that had won her livelihood now won her life, but its resources were drained to the utmost, and she came from long days of wasting fever, emaciated and weak. A merciful lassitude of spirit replaced the rebellious unrest, and she gave herself to whatever chance might come.

In her convalescence she learned of a new compassion and a hitherto unguessed charity. The folk of the little town had been duly impressed by the fact that she had been leading lady of a theatrical troupe, and they took no pains nor had means to inquire too closely into her exact artistic status. With that quick appreciation of loneliness that exists only in small communities, they hastened to offer their friendship to relieve the tedium of her illness.

At first Juno was suspicious of the sincerity of the gifts and visits that came to her. Her life had been so full of shams and pretences that genuine sympathy was scarce recognizable. The modest hospital

shared all its secrets with the community that supported it, and Juno soon learned that she had been adopted cheerfully and charitably by Reedbury. The suspicions gradually vanished, lulled by the continued honesty of her new acquaintances.

On the hospital records she was enrolled as Polly Morgan, the name that Max Weisbaum had given the doctor who met the train. The manager had craftily surmised that to allow one Juno in hospital and another on the stage might involve risk of embarrassing complications. So for the second time in her career Polly Morgan found herself burying one character and creating another.

With the assumption of her old name and with the weaning of her thoughts from the tragedy of Juno's despairing ambition came a new accession of desire. She wanted to continue to live—just how, she did not know. For the first time in her life she was free from necessity of defense; relieved of the thralldom that self-preservation had imposed, and at ease with leisure to make a fresh estimate of life and its problems. She was willing to take to herself an ally.

The generous and cordial folk who visited her came with a sort of manners unfamiliar to her—gentle, honest, frank. Hitherto she had exchanged her beauty for all favors that had come to her; now she had no beauty to barter. She argued that here, at last, was something different from the "phony" sentiments she had been accustomed to.

During these introspective days she studied the manners of these strangely likable "rubes," and subtly determined that it was the rôle of expediency to alter her own habits to conform. Once out of the hospital, she knew not what fortune might cast her way. She knew that burlesque was no longer open to her; and she smiled as she looked at her wasted limbs. The absence of communication from any member of her old company was sufficient hint that she was of no further use to them.

Polly Morgan, with wiles and guile, prepared and rehearsed herself for a new adventure in life.

The kindly doctor who had cared for her insisted on regarding her as a child—it was

his habitual attitude toward his patients. He scolded her and tyrannized over her wilful spirit until her first distaste for the "old geek" was replaced by a strong affection.

Dr. Benton was devoted to his profession, and conceived that his professional duty lay as much in distributing optimism as medicaments. He was popular in his community, jovially middle-aged, and entirely impartial in his administrations, whether of morals or medicine. In Polly he discovered an untouched field in which to sow his sugar-coated precepts of living.

"God gave you a beautiful body for some great purpose," he moralized.

"Yes; others has told me that before. But I guess they all meant it different than you," observed Polly.

"But you abused it," continued the physician. "My! You must have abused it something shameful! That was a sin, and God sent this sickness upon you to punish you. You see, when folks commit a sin with their minds or against somebody else, they're punished when their conscience gets sick; and when they commit a sin against their bodies, they're punished when their bodies get sick."

"But, Doc, what if they didn't know 'twas a sin when they was committin' it?" smiled Polly.

The doctor frowned at the old, old sophistry. "A good while ago the courts settled that by ruling that ignorance of the law is no excuse."

"Then, Doc, how can there be such thing as innocence?"

In the seclusion of her hospital room Polly had begun to learn to reason.

"You're getting pretty deep into ethics now," replied the doctor. "But I think I understand what it is that's puzzling you. You can't understand why you should be punished for something that you didn't know was wrong."

"That's the idea, Doc."

"Well, then, I guess God sent this sickness so that you might find out the difference between right and wrong. Maybe it was the only way that He could make you understand."

"Maybe 'twas," mused Polly.

That was her first lesson in morals, and from its meager basis she began to construct a new code.

Dr. Benton became a formative power to her, and he insinuated his teachings in such a way that her stubborn spirit felt no rebellion.

One day he came to her bedside and said:

"I think you're strong enough now for me to tell you something. There's another sin that you must pay for."

"Kind o' high prices He puts on sins, ain't they?" said Polly.

"Sometimes 'the wages of sin is death,' " quoted the doctor.

"I ain't never been as bad as that, Doc; honest I ain't."

"Now, I'm not going to tell anybody else what I know about you," the doctor continued. "You've got a mighty bad throat trouble that has come from smoking and drinking and carousing around. There's a sort of fungus growth there that may grow into something pretty serious unless it's removed now. It will not be a very long nor a very bad operation, but it's one that we've got to be mighty careful about."

"Well, I s'pose I'll have to stand for it if you say so, an' if it's part of what I got to pay," assented the patient.

"But I haven't told you the greatest danger that lies in this operation," warned the doctor. "The growth is in such a position that it will be necessary to disturb some of the controlling muscles of the larynx or voice-box. You may never be able to sing again."

The irony of the statement affected Polly in a way that perplexed the physician. She actually laughed at the possibility he had hinted at, and he feared that she had become hysterical with fear that she would lose the voice that he supposed had made her famous.

"I should worry!" she chuckled. "Cut out the whole darned thing for all I care, Doc. It 'll be punishment for what it's done to me!"

The operation was performed, and soon thereafter Polly was able to leave the hospital and take up life in the family of a Mrs. Marsden, which place the doctor had obtained for her, and recommended as offering

the quiet and genial atmosphere she required for complete recuperation.

To the girl who had known nothing but the gaudy electric flashiness of noisy cafés, or the dingy retreats of rooms in cheap hotels, the modest and lamp-lighted rooms of the Marsden home were strange experiences. She wanted to laugh at the crocheted tidies pinned to backs of chairs, at the bouquet of dried and dyed pampas grass and peacock feathers, and at the walnut-cased parlor organ in the rooms downstairs, and at the gilded rolling pin equipped with hooks that hung from a scarlet ribbon in her bedchamber.

But she reflected that her inexperience in private homes might lead her into a blunder, and, besides, it was expedient that she should wait and see how she could use these simple folk. So she accepted the gaucheries along with the wholesomeness of their intent.

A night's experience between sweet-smelling sheets of a bed that was softly and cleanly luxurious, and a surprising appetite for a breakfast whose cream and eggs were of an unknown freshness left her firmly decided that there was nothing to laugh at in this life. Instead she found herself fearful that she might be the object of ridicule.

There were two other boarders in the Marsden ménage, two girls who clerked in the Bon Ton store, and who at first stood in great awe of the girl who had seen so infinitely more of life than they. Polly accepted them naturally as her equals in station, and they passed the word that the actress wasn't a bit stuck up. They formed the nucleus of the group of friends the former chorus girl gathered about her.

The problem of clothes perplexed Polly. She noted with approval the simple serge skirts and plain blouses of Lily Reed and Minna Lempert, the Bon Ton clerks, and an inventory of her showy wardrobe resulted in a disgusted rejection of the satin, silk, and velvet luxuries it contained. There must have been many alterations to accommodate these fulsome frocks to her now attenuated frame. She called Lily and Minna into consultation, and they, highly flattered, assisted with dyes and needles to transform an elaborate sand-colored travel-

ing suit into a modest blue and serviceable outfit.

Polly turned the key of her trunk on the other souvenirs of dress, and with that act symbolized her renunciation of the life these clothes had costumed. Down at the bottom of the trunk, savagely crushed, lay the white silk fleshings that had so generously displayed Juno's delectable limbs.

Rudimentary minds require visible proof of spiritual changes, and to Polly the accession of her new garb was, more than anything else, symbol of a similar transition of spirit. She changed the style of dressing her hair; and with the new coiffure departed the furtiveness from her eyes.

"I'll try anything once," she told herself. "Maybe this simple stuff is good dope. Anyway, I'll dress for the part."

From which it may be seen that Polly had not entirely discarded her code of expediency.

That night she buried her face in a fragrant potted geranium that Mrs. Marsden had installed in her room, and the reek of grease paint and the gracelessly seductive scents of the theater passed from her nostrils.

That geranium was a constant source of childlike wonder to Polly. She had known flowers before—forced blooms that withered almost before their beauty had been appreciated—but she had never considered how or why they grew. This cheerfully pink flower, always fresh and jauntily growing, was a new experience.

"I guess you're right," she told the plant. "You got to get your roots down in the earth if you want to live. Me, I always been a kind o' cut flower, and just look how I wilted!"

Polly's small hoard of savings was dangerously insufficient to keep her long in idleness. The bulk of her slender fortune was invested in diamonds. She adroitly questioned Lily and Minna whether there existed in Reedbury a pawnbroker with whom she might hypothecate the jewels; but found that the little town had no need for such an institution.

Dr. Benton was continually attentive to his interesting patient. Many times he took her, snugly wrapped, on long rides about

the country, and while his cheap and noisy car chugged and rattled over the frozen roads, he had drawn from her a fair outline of her history. He was keen in his analysis of human nature, and by no means confined his healing arts to physical ills.

On one of these rides Polly inquired the amount of her debt to him. She gasped at the apparent exorbitance of the sum the doctor assessed her.

With shrewd wisdom he had determined upon a price that would strip her of any surplus resources, calculating that thus he might restrain her from a return to her former life, and watch the experiment of transplanting her to an utterly strange environment.

"Well, Doc, I'll have to pay you in ice," promised Polly, and the physician did not sense her meaning until the next day, when she brought him a handful of rings, pins, sunbursts, and other adornments, all studded with jewels.

The amazed doctor stared at the glittering mass.

"My! What 'll I ever do with them?" he ejaculated.

"Put 'em in hock; that's what I always done," calmly replied Polly. "You saved my life, an' some way now it looks kind o' though it was like them sparklers: just made for show; an' so it seems kind o' 'propriate that you get your pay in them rocks."

Dr. Benton, prone to prosy moralizing, studied the scintillant jewelry.

"They *do* seem kind o' useless. But they're beautiful, and beauty always has a use. I guess God must have made them for some good purpose, like He does everything beautiful."

"Seems to me I've heard that somewhere before," smiled Polly. "But you're right about their bein' useful. I seen times when they helped me over some tight places."

"They're kind o' like cut flowers," continued the doctor. "Pretty, but not very practical."

"Don't fool yourself about that, Doc. When they're hocked, an' you get a handful of dirty old dollar bills for 'em, they look pretty good."

"Yes, that's true: when beauty is turned

into good, practical dollar bills it can accomplish some good."

"A dirty old dollar bill ain't got much beauty about it, but it can do a lot of good work," commented Polly, quick to catch the drift of the fable the doctor had begun. "It's kind o' like that June-bug they used to have a joke about: it gets there just the same."

"Why don't you try being a dollar bill for a while and see how you like it," Dr. Benton suggested. "You know you can always trade back your working capital for beauty."

"That's just what I was thinkin'," said Polly. "I ain't much of a diamond for show now, but maybe I can pass for a dollar bill."

"Real money, and not counterfeit," absently remarked the doctor.

"I'll keep the diamonds, and if you ever want them back you can redeem them. How does that arrangement please you?" bargained Dr. Benton.

"Suits me all right. Just at present them rocks ain't worth a lead dime to me. All I want is a chance to try this dollar-bill stunt."

"Another month of rest, and you shall have it," promised the doctor.

At the boarding-house the other girls, expectant of some exhibition of Polly's hyperbolic talent, urged her to sing for them. She refused on the excuse that the operation had robbed her of her voice, and smiled sardonically. With keen sensitiveness, Lily and Minna did not urge her after that, and even refrained from their customary jousts with the parlor organ lest the music awaken painful memories that would disturb her.

Came Christmas with another enlightening insight into the wonderfully sympathetic bond that held all the community of Reedbury in such intimate communion. Polly overheard secret whisperings in which plans for all sorts of gifts to all sorts of friends were made. She surprised Lily and Minna, and forced them to hide hastily the work they were doing. She absorbed the spirit of the time, was caught by the mysticism of it, and one day made a surreptitious shopping trip from which she re-

turned, to sneak into the house and hide in her room many curious packages.

On her shopping tour she discovered a rack of gay Christmas cards. One, glistening with mock-snow, bore a flaming motto: "Peace on earth, good will to men." She purchased the card, and that evening displayed it on her dresser while she studied and admired it.

"Gawd! Ain't that the truth! I never knew what peace or good-will either was before. It's Christmas all the year here!"

She pondered over the card for a while, and then addressed it in a scrawly hand to Max Weisbaum.

"He prob'ly won't get the big idea at all," she chuckled. "But this stuff here's got my goat so's I feel like doin' damn-fool things."

Polly had never shed tears in her life except of rage or humiliation. Now a new sort of mistiness filled her eyes and stung her nostrils.

"Gawd! I wish I knew where my mother was so's I could send her a card!" she sobbed.

The theatrical Christmases that Polly had known, with their forced merriment and their ineffectual attempts to forget; their audiences of sad-eyed derelicts, and the gaunt homelessness of their hollow festivities, were forgotten in the warmth and friendship of the day in Reedbury, when Dr. Benton came early to exchange gifts, and Lily and Minna and Mrs. Marsden gave her things made with their own hands and kissed her and wished her a merry time with such unction that she forgot all suspicion.

That night she wept again—tears of joy. Polly nearly forgot her code of expediency then.

On New Year's Day Dr. Benton came to invite Polly for a ride. Somewhere out in the bleakness of the country he broke a long silence:

"Well, I guess it's about time for the dollar bill to get to work."

"Say! You said a mouthful then!" agreed Polly. "The little wad up in the bureau drawer's gettin' pretty slim."

"How would you like to work with Lily and Minna at the Bon Ton?" he asked.

"Great!" assented Polly.

"That's good that you like the idea, because I've hired you out, and you can start in Monday. It won't be hard to learn the business, and the other girls will show you about it."

"Gee! I've took a Steve into lots of things I didn't know nothing 'bout before, an' I guess I can get away with this," laughed the girl.

"There won't be any diamond glitter about clerking," warned the doctor. "It's just plain and sometimes dirty dollar bills."

"That's me all over now," said Polly. "I ain't particularly dirty, but I'm darned plain."

The doctor neglected to detail the alacrity with which young George Anderson, heir to the Bon Ton and its manager, had seized upon the opportunity to engage the former actress as a clerk, but he took occasion to observe:

"Most girls that start in clerking in the Bon Ton sooner or later quit the job to get married. If you do that be sure you pick a dollar bill instead of a diamond."

"I get you, Doc! They ain't goin' to be no make-up on the man I pick."

"Oh-ho! So you're going to do the picking, are you!" laughed the physician.

When Dr. Benton set her down at the boarding-house door he clasped Polly's hand tightly and said:

"Good luck to you, dollar bill!"

"Good luck to yourself, you old wad of greenbacks!" answered Polly, and hastened in to tell Lily and Minna what was already a matter of village gossip.

On Monday she took up her new duties, and trade continued brisk at her counter of gingham and cotton stuffs while the friendly-curious interest of Reedbury folk lasted.

Young George Anderson personally tutored her in the intricacies of measuring, pricing, and wrapping her sales, while other clerks smiled knowingly.

Young George was the most sophisticated man in Reedbury. He made occasional trips to Chicago as buyer for the Bon Ton, and imported to the village many metropolitan airs of dress and manners along with the merchandise that was ostensibly the chief object of his journeys.

Polly held him firmly to practicalities during her period of instruction, and confided to Lily:

"He thinks he's wise; but I've fooled 'em so much wiser 'n him that he's pie for me."

"He ain't through sowin' his wild oats yet," sagely observed Lily.

"Well, I ain't goin' to help him sow or harvest his crop," replied Polly.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MIRACLE.

BY the time spring had arrived Polly had thoroughly adopted Reedbury ways and had been thoroughly accepted as a member of that community. No one longer thought of her as "that actress"; and she had become simply "Polly Morgan, that nice clerk in the Bon Ton." Thus quickly do small and warmly human places forget and forgive when their chastened children establish their regeneration.

With Polly the quietude of the village was much like the tranquillity the soldier finds after the turmoil of battle. Sometimes she yearned for the old excitements, but these times were seldom and quick-passing. She had learned confidence in human motives and faith in human goodness; that she could safely trust herself here without the alert, unnatural, and portentous defiance that had once marked all men as her antagonists.

Her skepticism vanished gradually before her persuasion of events, and as her natural fears were abated there rose to the surface a complacency of character that was as comfortable to herself as to others.

Not that she became any superior and seraphic paragon of virtues: she was too strongly individual for that. She retained the wilfulness that had led her safely through so many hazards, and this and her modified selfishness were turned to new uses less redoubtable than the old. The expedients she adopted now shared concern of self with concern for others.

She remained contemptuous of the humbleness with which the village folk bowed to specious moralities, because her vastly

broader experience had taught her a sterner virtue. Likewise she overrode ruthlessly some of the trivial maxims of behavior that hedged so falsely the public actions of Reedbury. Out of the testy past and the tranquil present she built for herself a complacent charity toward Polly Morgan and all the rest of the world.

While her body and mind rested the wasted tissues were rebuilt, and she regained her pristine plumpness.

Once in the privacy of her room she dug from the trunk the crumpled white silk tights and fitted them again to her rounded limbs. She found that they clung as snugly as ever they did, and for a moment she was compelled to an admiring view in her glass of Juno, the Perfect Woman.

Then she stripped the fleshings off and angrily shredded them to bits. At the supper-table she related:

"Say! I tried on my old costume to-night; but it didn't seem hardly the thing to wear to the church entertainment, so I guess I'll have to go in that cream voile waist and blue skirt."

No one appreciated the gusto of her laughter, and she sobered as she continued:

"Ain't it funny how they dress little innocent girls, and nice, clean brides in white, and then use the same color for another kind of folks! Seems as if they ought to have a law not to let them use it for anything 'cept clean things!"

Lily and Minna puzzled over the symbolism of her remark.

In exact ratio to the return of Polly's charms was the increase in the attentions that George Anderson paid her. Other swains of the village had attempted awkward overtures, but had received scant encouragement. Polly accepted young George's escort to the simple entertainments of the town, his Sunday evening calls, and his frequent gifts of candy and books with marked appreciation. He clumsily attempted to educate her to his standards of propriety, and she was grateful for his tutelage, accepting or rejecting such parts of his teaching as she saw fit.

One night she told him frankly:

"George, do you know the reason I go round with you is because you know just ~

a little bit—not much—more about the world than the rest of these rubes?”

Their talk drifted to discussion of Chicago cafés and public places of entertainment, subjects in which they found common ground, and the boy's boastful experience with the ways of this imitation world was flattered to find that Polly had shared with him some of its dissipations. She encouraged his reminiscences because they held her to the atmosphere to which she had been born.

When Dr. Benton came with unexpected invitations to ride with him Polly forgot her tacit engagements with young George. She and the doctor rode long miles in contented self-absorption or in earnest discussion of some of the moralities in which he so delighted.

Once he asked her:

“You don't bear me any ill will because I cut the song out of you, do you?”

“Don't fool yourself, Doc; you didn't cut out anything 'cept an aggravation,” she replied.

Another time she broke a silence:

“Say, Doc, you and several others has told me that God made me pretty for some good purpose. Do you suppose it was to sell gingham?”

Dr. Benton chuckled as he cryptically replied:

“The time is not yet.”

During the verdant days of spring while the world was at crescendo, Polly and Lily and Minna took long walks that never failed to bring juvenile enthusiasm to the girl who had known so little of natural beneficence.

She picked great clusters of lush dandelion blooms, and when the other girls ridiculed her passion for the humble flowers, she reminded them that the barren asphalt of her former life had known no blossoms.

“Doc says I'm a dollar bill, and these look like gold-pieces that God's put here to kind o' help out the ten dollars a week the Bon Ton pays me.”

One sunny Sunday morning in May, Polly and the other girls were walking through the river woods when she confided:

“You know, I never put my feet to the ground much till I come here. An' I never

saw much daylight, either. Pavements an' electric lights was about all I knew.”

Then, with a sudden ebullition of joy, she threw back her head and sang.

The first notes of the cheaply sentimental ballad bubbled forth, true to pitch, and in a mellow contralto. There was an elusive quality to the clarity of the voice, an undertone of great sympathy, an ineffable sweet sadness that throbbed and beat and seemed always at the point of becoming a keening wail. It neared the plaintiveness of those threnodies in which rabbinical cantors proclaim their hopeless lamentations.

The song was spontaneous, entirely free from artificiality; as natural as the pulsing elation of a bird. It rose and fell and died away in an eery legato, uncontrolled by any will of the singer.

While the final note of the votive outburst hung throbbing on the air, Lily and Minna gasped in awed admiration. They could not comprehend why such a marvelous gift had been choked in silence for so long.

Polly stood with blanched face, her mouth agape, and her eyes staring hard, at the prodigious miracle. Her flesh chilled in contemplating the awe of the thing that had happened.

In simple effusion Lily and Minna praised and upbraided:

“Oh, Polly! What a voice! You had no right to keep it still so long!”

Polly looked at them with unseeing, unbelieving eyes. Then her lips went a tremble, and her eyes flooded with tears, and she sank to the earth in an abject heap.

“Oh, God! I wish I knew how to thank Doc and you!” she sobbed.

Then she ran from the woods, leaving Lily and Minna completely confused. As soon as she could reach him she demanded, out of breath and with misty eyes, of Dr. Benton:

“Say, Doc! What did you put in my throat?”

“Why, nothing; I took out a lot that didn't belong there.”

“Then listen!”

And Polly sent sobbing and throbbing through the doctor's shabby little office the tender-sad melody of “Annie Laurie,” the

song she once had been compelled to learn to lead a tartan-clad burlesque chorus:

"Like dew on the gowan lying,
Is the fa' o' her fairy feet, —
And like winds in summer sighing,
Her voice is low and sweet;
Her voice is low and sweet,
And she's a' the world to me,
And for bonnie Annie Laurie
I'd lay me down and dee."

The doctor stood with his face averted from the singer. Polly was oblivious of him until the legato and minor cadence of the fervid avowal of endless devotion was completed. Then she waited until he slowly turned, and in great thankfulness, said:

"Thank God! Then I didn't ruin it!"

"No, Doc; you didn't exactly *ruin* it!" laughed Polly.

Then she went to him and very soberly requested:

"I want to kiss you, Doc, before I tell you something."

The doctor leaned his grizzled cheek to accept her caress, and Polly penitently made her confession:

"I've always been a cheat and fraud, Doc. I've cheated you, too; an' you've been 'bout the best friend I ever had. I never had no voice! I wasn't nothing but a low-down, cheap burlesque prim. I showed my legs, an' they was the only thing that got me by. I wanted to sing—God knows how I wanted to sing! But I couldn't, no matter how hard I tried. A man told me once that I was like a swan: a beautiful bird, but without any voice. An' you thought I amounted to something! An' you've been worryin' 'cause you was afraid you spoiled my voice! It was dirt mean of me to cheat you like that, Doc!"

Her contrition was abject, and the doctor comforted her with a hand on her shoulder, as he exclaimed:

"Then I have given you a voice instead of robbing you of one!"

"That's exactly what you've done, you clumsy old sawbones!"

"And now you can go back to the stage and become famous, and the Bon Ton will lose a mighty good clerk."

"Not too fast, Doc! I ain't goin' back—not yet for awhile. You told me once

the Bon Ton clerks usually got married, and I ain't never tried bein' married yet. I kind o' like to try everything once."

"But that voice! You owe that to the world!"

"The world's collected every cent this dollar bill owes it," asserted Polly. "I had one taste of ambition and it didn't taste very good, so I guess I'll pass up any more full-sheet fame."

"I wouldn't be too certain that my debt to the world had been entirely canceled if I were you," cautioned the physician in a grave tone.

"Well, anyway, I ain't goin' to pay the rest of it the way I started to," said Polly. "But what are you goin' to do to me for actin' a lie to you an' makin' you think I was a great singer an' actress?"

"Don't be too certain that I haven't known all the time just who and what you were. I *didn't* know that you couldn't sing, but the rest of it wasn't such a secret as you imagined."

Polly had a revelation of the purpose of the doctor's long and kindly moral lessons. She was wilfully and angrily resentful.

"Then you've been tryin' to reform me!" she snapped.

"No; just been performing operations on you; cutting out fungus growths," the doctor quietly admitted.

"Why didn't you tell me you was tryin' to make me over to suit your goody-goody ideas?" questioned the girl, her senseless pique steadily growing.

"Because persons under an anesthetic suffer less pain than those who are conscious."

Polly was overwhelmed with a sudden rage, born of the nervous excitement into which the discovery of her surprising gift had thrown her. She was blindly unreasoning; utterly rebellious at this moralist who had presumed to interfere with her complacency, and utterly beside herself in her conception that this man had attempted to alter her character and thus had implied a criticism of her former state. In a reversion to vulgarity, she swept from the room with a parting hissed defiance:

"To hell with you and your operations!"

Her later regret at this outburst was

overbalanced by her selfish conceit, and her rides with Dr. Benton ceased.

CHAPTER VII.

VOX HUMANA.

THE apex of all musical ambition in Reedbury was a position as soloist in the choir of the Church of the Redeemer, a conformist chapel that had great vogue in the community. The repute of Polly's voice soon brought her an invitation to that enviable place and the opportunity of guidance by the capable director of the church choir.

She accepted the occasion, and studiously applied herself to hymns and anthems, strangely antithetical to those trashy rag-time ditties that once had occupied her attention.

Her vocal talents were peculiarly adapted to the stately rhythms of the sacred music, and her passion for the better forms of compositions sent her unerringly to choose for her numbers songs that were as distinctive as the appealing *timbre* of her voice. The Lydian measures of the largoes of Handel and the sonorous dignities of Bach were in her repertoire, and she startled and thrilled the congregations of the Church of the Redeemer with unexpected performances.

Once she sang the intensely devotional Schubert "Ave Maria," and the throbbing fervor of the song, irresistible, overpowering, as mysterious as the immutable poundings of a wind-lashed sea on a hollow coast, left her auditory breathless and confusedly contrite. Again she chose the impassioned and imposing Jewish chant, "Eili Eili," and the *penseroso* and triste dejection of it sent hearts sinking to meek and chastened depths.

Sometimes she used the sobbing, primitive ecstasy of a negro chant; but always she filled her hearers with a deep sense of humility, and sent them from the chapel groping and supplicant. Her voice was apocalyptic, orphic, pregnant with vision and prophecy.

So completely did Polly dominate the services of the Church of the Redeemer that the choirmaster and the rector rather timid-

ly and awesomely refrained from any interference with her apparently inspired desires. The latter divined that his homilies had no force or emphasis in comparison with the moving fervor of the singer's praise.

But if there was an apparent inspired grace in her vocal orisons, there was little reflection of it in Polly's character. When under the spell of her music she was transformed, lost to her surroundings, imbued with some afflatus that set her apart for that moment; once out of the spell, she was likely to indulge in some raillery that had the odor of blasphemy.

Polly retained her position as clerk in the Bon Ton and continued about her daily life contentedly and without presumption of any new importance. Her beauty was enhanced by the supreme happiness she felt in the gratification of the great ambition of her life.

Her fame as a singer was wide-spreading, and the peculiar elegiac quality of her tonal expression gained for her the popular title of the "Girl with a Cry in Her Voice." There soon came to her offers from larger churches, and opportunities for concert work: these she rejected.

"All they mean is pavements and electric lights again," she explained. "I'm afraid to go back."

Dr. Benton, heretofore a somewhat casual worshiper, was regularly at the church when Polly sang, and young George Anderson was invariably on hand to accompany her home or for a walk or drive after the services.

Young George was proud of the monopoly that Polly allowed him of her company, and did nothing to deny the current and popular acceptance of his proprietary interest in her. Neither did Polly do anything to dispel the garrulous tradition. In the way that small communities have, Reedbury accepted an engagement between the two, and unrefuted gossip made the rumor as authentic as if the bans had been published. Had George, vainly desirous, been daring enough to put his ambitions to the test at this time, Polly might have embraced the opportunity to "try anything once."

Her irrational affront to Dr. Benton was a bitter memory to Polly. Her stubborn wilfulness, an abashed sense of guilt, and a rankling assumption of injury in that he had presumed to criticize her combined to prevent any effort to right her admitted wrong. She construed from his admission that he had sought to eliminate undesirable qualities from her character the implication that he believed her to have been an unvirtuous and morally unclean woman. The injustice and untruth of this angered her, and goaded her to further emotions of resentment.

In Polly Morgan's consciousness the errors of conduct in the old theatrical days were regarded as innocent lapses condoned by absence of knowledge of proprieties learned later. She took refuge in the confusing argument that ignorance of the law is at least a palliation. Her animosity toward Dr. Benton increased as she magnified the injustice of the estimate of her she believed he had made. Her sorrow at losing his friendship and guidance intensified this resentment.

The doctor remained quietly tolerant, and, though thrown into frequent meeting with Polly, never obtruded any further sign than mere recognition.

Once Polly was witness to an accident in which an awkward and blundering mongrel puppy had fallen victim to a passing automobile. She gathered the whimpering little dog from the dust of the street and sat nursing it and crooning to it on the curb, its blood and the filth of the roadway smirching her skirt and her handkerchief with which she tenderly cleansed the wound, Dr. Benton drove his noisy car to a stop.

Without any formalities of address, he inspected the puppy's hurt and diagnosed it as a broken leg.

"Let me take the poor little tike and I think I can fix him up," he said as he lifted the injured mongrel to the seat of his car.

Again Polly was caught in that strange, unreasoning conflict of emotions. Her pity for the animal found a reflex in the malicious sneer she flung at the doctor:

"Another yellow cur for you to reform!" she taunted.

"I hope so," he quietly replied. "What were *you* going to do with him?"

The question left her confused, but still more angry, and she was unable to reply, while the doctor drove away with a promise to return the puppy to her when he had repaired the broken leg.

When the dog's bone had knit again Dr. Benton left him at Mrs. Marsden's, and Polly accepted his saffron unloveliness upon which to spend her hungry affections. He was dubbed Sulfur because of his tawny yellowishness, and thenceforth every drop of his nondescript blood was wholly and devotedly Polly's.

By late summer long lines of parked cars outside the crowded Church of the Redeemer testified to the increasing fame of the Girl with a Cry in Her Voice. They came from long distances, drawn by the lodestone of that voice, and each who heard carried a way a sense of almost intolerable beauty.

Polly's present fame completely eclipsed any former claims to public attention, and the first and second distinctions that Reedbury had conferred on her were submerged and lost in the new importance. She was no longer "the actress" or the "nice clerk in the Bon Ton," but "Polly Morgan, the Girl with a Cry in Her Voice." Reedbury was very proud of the fame it shared with her.

Once, at the solicitation of the choir-master, a critic from a Chicago musical publication visited the Church of the Redeemer and departed to bestow printed praises upon Polly's voice. He importuned her for a photograph for reproduction, but she refused in apparently inexplicable fright. His notice brought her an increased number of flattering offers to use her voice in new fields: she consistently rejected them all.

George Anderson, with much assumption of interest, advised her to accept one particularly tempting offer from a noted impresario, arguing that it presented an opportunity for her to enjoy "real life" again. He was contemptuous of the restricted provincialism of Reedbury and uncomprehending of Polly's stanch refusals to avail herself of good fortune.

It was quite evident that the old code of expediency no longer obtained.

CHAPTER VIII.

RUN TO EARTH.

THERE came one Sunday to sit with the customary crowd of strangers in the Church of the Redeemer an alert and nervously embarrassed man. The showiness of his attire and the flashing opulence of the diamond horseshoe in his scarf were incongruous there.

He was enmeshed in the spell of Polly's voice, and scarce restrained his involuntary impulse to applaud a demand for an encore when she had finished. His narrow-lidded eyes were greedy when he left the church to take a stand on the walk outside.

When Polly came from the church the stranger jostled George Anderson from her side and rudely and familiarly accosted her:

"Lo, Juno!"

Polly whitened, and her knees faltered. She reached for George Anderson's steady-
ing arm as she gasped:

"Max Weisbaum!"

"Yeh! It's me, your old daddy come back f'r you! Gawd! But you're sure lookin' more like a queen than ever!" purred Max.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Polly.

"Kind o' looks as though *now* I come to see you," replied Weisbaum, and in an undertone: "Give the John the gate an' come with me; I wan't t' talk t' you."

Polly hurriedly urged George Anderson to excuse her and led Max toward an obscure street. She was weak with apprehension and sick with repugnance at this man whom she had once so complacently accepted.

Max was genially confident of his ground and lost no time in revealing the purpose of his visit.

"I ain't in the burlesque game no more," he announced. "They couldn't keep wise little Maxie down very long. Got two musical comedies out playin' f'r me now, an' I'm goin' to put on a whale of a jazzy show right on Broadway that 'll make the 'Pol-

lies' look like a baby's funeral. When I was wise 'nough to frame up that old Juno act it sure give me a start!"

"That's fine, Max," Polly half-heartedly complimented.

"Yeh! If y' got the goods y' sure can make good!" assented Max.

"How'd you come to land in Reed-bury?" hesitantly inquired Polly, unconsciously conforming her diction to his.

"Saw a press notice 'bout this Girl with a Cry in Her Voice, an' it sounded good t' me, so I thought I'd scout a little an' see if she didn't have the makin's of a star in her. Y' could 'a' knocked me down with a feather when I saw who 'twas."

"How did you like my voice?"

"Aw, it's good. But say! I'd like t' see you in tights *now*! Y've sure got a greater shape than ever, an' that's sayin' a lot!"

"It's skirts for me now, Max."

"Still got that bug 'bout bein' a reg'lar prima donna, wearin' skirts an' singin', eh?"

"Yes, Max; I can do both now."

"Ever think o' leavin' this tank town?"

"No; I'm very happy here."

"Don't ever get thirsty for a good drink an' a jazzy cabaret?"

"Never."

"How'd y' like to come with me an' star in my new show?"

"No. Max; I'm sorry, but I'm off the show game f'r good."

"Wouldn't like to see y'r name in bright lights on Broadway?"

"Not at all."

"Sure 'bout that?"

"Absolutely sure."

Max fished from a morocco case an ornate gold and amber cigarette holder, filled it, and stuck its prodigious length into his mouth at an impudent angle.

"Don't be too sure!" he truculently observed. "I've got a contract with you, young lady, that's never been filled!"

"You mean—"

"Yeh! I mean I ain't overlookin' any chances t' help little Max, the wise old bird! You're a big hit now, an' I can make y' the biggest thing on Broadway. If you ain't wise 'nough t' know it, I'm right there t' help y' t' see sense, an' to help you along—an' me, too!"

"But I won't go."

"Aw, I guess y' will! Now look here! I *made* y' once an' I'm ready an' willin' t' take a chance again. You wasn't nothin' but a chorus jane when I took y' an' made good with y'. Y' ought to have some gratitude f'r that!"

"But you dumped me flat!"

"Well, y' wasn't no good then. An' 'sides, look at what the change done f'r y'! Y' look better 'n ever, an' you've learned t' sing!"

"You can't claim credit for that!" flared Polly.

"Well, maybe not; but I pulled y' out of the chorus an' made y', an' now y' got a chance t' pay me back. Ain't y' got no heart?"

"I'm sorry, Max."

"Sorry, hell! Think of the billin' y' can get! The Girl with a Cry in Her Voice! I don't know who doped that out, but it's great! A riot! Can't y' see it? D' y' mean to say y'r goin' t' turn me down!"

"No, Max; it don't look good to me."

"Well, then, I'm goin' t' make it look good t' y'! I've got y' on that contract. What y' goin' t' do 'bout that?"

"You told me once it was only made to be broke."

"That's easier said than done."

"I'm sorry, Max; but I can't go with you."

Then the manager threw aside all pretense, and became the old blustering, profane opportunist; the man Polly remembered as bullying chorus girls and mouthing lewd indelicacies behind the scenes and in dressing-rooms. His voice was malicious, sneering:

"Yeh! So you're a nice, little, innocent country girl now in a nice, sweet little town! Sing in the church an' go 'round with the richest feller in the village! Aw, I know all 'bout y' an' y'r little game! Why, y' poor offscourin' of the dirty streets! You ungrateful strumpet! D' y' s'pose I'm goin' t' let y' get away with it! I made y', an' y' belong t' me! I need y' now an' I'm goin' to have y'!"

"Not so loud, Max; not so loud!"

"Don't want folks here t' know what kind of a girl y' used t' be, eh! Want 'em

t' think y'r a nice, simple, innocent little country girl! Like t' keep up the bluff, eh! Wouldn't like t' have me tell 'em that y'r nothin' but a damned burlesque—"

"Don't go too far, Max! Remember there's some things I ain't never been!"

"I'll show y' how far I'll go if y' don't treat me white now!"

"I can't come, Max."

"All right, then! Now I'm goin' t' tell y' what I'm goin' t' do! I'll come into this nice, sweet, little country town where the nice, sweet, innocent, simple country girl sings in the church an' I'll plaster the whole damned place with them old full-sheets of Juno, tights an' all. I still got a lot o' that paper the censors turned down. How'd y' like that, eh? The Perfect Woman on all the bill-boards in town an' the cards scattered 'round with y'r measurements! Guess they'd recognize their nice, innocent little church singer, wouldn't they?"

Polly leaned against a tree for support while Max, his teeth showing in a vulpine, derisive grin, watched her frightened face.

"You wouldn't do that?" she pleaded.

"Oh, I wouldn't eh! You watch me! I'll give y' till t'-morrow t' think it over, an' then it's either the Girl with a Cry in Her Voice on Broadway, or Juno, the Perfect Woman in this nice, sweet little town, an' to hell with you an' y'r church singin' an' the fine little bluff y've been gettin' away with!"

"I'll think it over, Max; let me go now," promised Polly.

That night Polly Morgan disappeared from Reedbury. With only a small trunk, and Sulfur tied complainingly in the baggage car, she stealthily departed without farewells and with tears of bitter regret in her eyes as she watched the flickering lights of the village disappear in the wake of the train.

Gossip soon brought the news of Polly's disappearance to an enraged and thwarted Max Weisbaum, and he hastened to consult with young George Anderson, whom he connected intimately with her life in Reedbury.

That unstable young gentleman listened avidly to Max's overdrawn revelation of Polly's origin, but cautioned the irate man-

ager not to make public the facts, promising his assistance in locating the missing girl.

Young George was wisely mindful of the criticism that gossip might direct at him should it become known that he had been unduly intimate with a woman of questionable character.

For the first time young George denied vehemently any closer bond than friendship between him and Polly Morgan.

Max Weisbaum followed another clue to the office of Dr. Benton, and as he went he stooped and sniffed much like a trailing bloodhound.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SONG OF THE SWAN.

FROM a dingy room in a cheap Chicago boarding-house Polly Morgan looked through unwashed panes at the drabbed, sordid street below her. A ragged, jauntily impertinent girl passed along the sidewalk, ogling male passers-by and flaunting her ill-hanging skirts. Across the street a garish electric sign labeled a café, whence came sounds of devil-may-care rag-time.

Polly's eyes were dry, drained of what tears they had held; and they were cold, hard, and impassively staring. She spoke, and her voice was strange, like the voices of men in delirium:

"Right back where I started from! Oh, God! I can't start all over again!"

The little yellow mongrel, roused from his slumbers on the bed by the sound of her voice, leaped down and hastened to his mistress. He made violent licks at her hands and intruded his chilly nose into her palms in efforts to comfort her distress.

Polly petted the dog, and while his devoted puppy eyes looked wistfully into hers, spoke to him:

"You may be yellow, Sulfur; but you're a damned sight whiter 'n most men I've known."

Then in a white-hot blaze of rage, furiously defiant and again overwhelmed by a strange contradiction of emotions, she shook a fist at the murky streets and cursed them and excoriated them:

"To hell with you and your bright lights! You won't get me again!"

Back to the whining, puzzled puppy again she turned:

"Oh, Sulfur, it ain't right! It ain't right! I been good always, an' I was tryin' so hard back there! An' I *can* sing! It ain't right! They all told me God give me beauty for some good purpose, an' now just look at me! It ain't right! It ain't right!"

Polly laughed hysterically. Her impotent rebellion had rode and worn her for two days. Her railings at fate had been varied with torrents of tears, morose repinings, and violent curses, and now she was near the point where her decision must be made.

She buried her head in the dog's yellow fur and wept again, helplessly. She was baffled, defeated, victimized.

Then she chattered insanely:

"They was only two things I ever wanted to do real bad, Sulfur. One was to keep clean and bring up a baby *right*, an' the other was to sing. I *can* sing, Sulfur! I *can* sing! Listen!"

With a new intensity of fervor, throbbing, sobbing, and pulsating in the narrow little room, rang out the Voice with a Cry in It:

"Her brow is like the snaw-drift,
Her throat is like the swan;
Her face it is the fairest
That e'er the sun shone on.
That e'er the sun shone on,
And dark blue is her e'e,
And for bonnie Annie Laurie
I'd lay me down and dee.

"Ain't that good, Sulfur! 'Her throat is like the swan'! They told me I was like a swan once. Well, they say when a swan comes to die it sings one song. I know how it feels, Sulfur. After waitin' all y'r life and wishin' and wishin' y' could sing, then when it comes time to quit y' *can* sing! Ain't it hell, Sulfur! Maybe that's me, Sulfur! I can 'lay me down and dee,' Sulfur; I can 'lay me down and dee'!"

Polly threw herself face downward on the bed in a paroxysm of tears. She did not hear the door open, and the man on the threshold cleared his throat to attract her attention. She turned to look at him with amazed, suspicious antagonism:

"Doc! You here!"

Dr. Benton stepped into the room, quieted the leaping exuberance of Sulfur's greeting, and went to the bed. Very quietly he said:

"Polly, I've come to take you home with me."

The girl sagged into dejection and her imagined shame threw her into a fresh outburst of tears. She sobbed:

"Oh, no! No! I can't go back! I'm disgraced! I'm done! I'm finished!"

The doctor comforted her with a touch, while she babbled:

"I've just sung my swan song. Let me alone now to 'lay me down and dee'!"

"No, Polly; you're not disgraced. No one knows that is going to tell, and you're free from further dangers," assured the doctor.

"But he'll put up them posters!" cried the girl.

"No, he won't. I've arranged that."

"But you don't know him. He's a hard guy, and he'll do anything to get me again! What did you do to him?"

"Well, he came to me to find a clue to your whereabouts, and I sized him up as one of those diamond sort of fellows we used to talk about, so I tried him out. I offered him your diamonds if he would promise to stop persecuting you, and he took them. Then I kicked him out of my office."

Polly's eyes were incredulous as she exclaimed: "Then you've saved me again!"

"Yes; and I hope for the last and best time. I should dread to think that I had to go on saving you always."

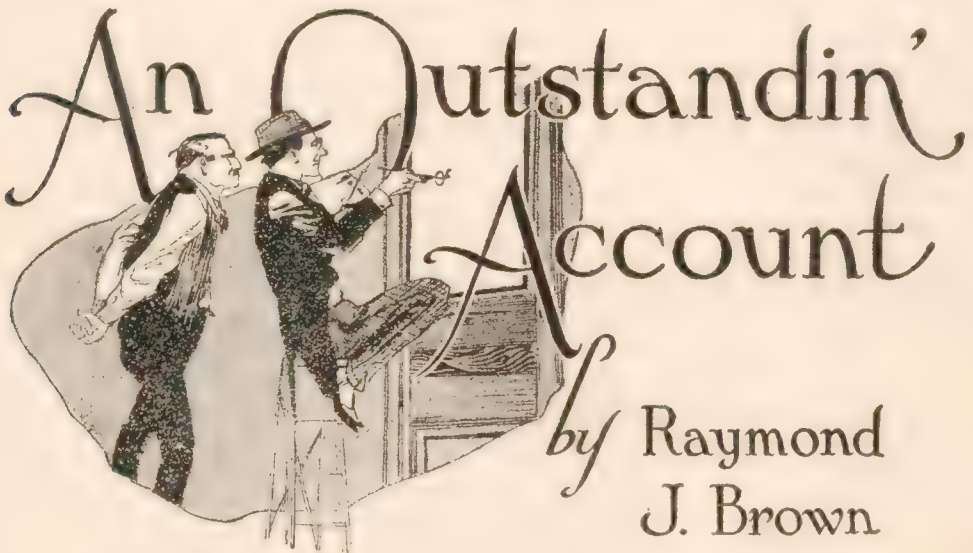
"But if you give him all the diamonds, then I still owe you."

"I think we can square that debt. I said I gave him all the diamonds, but I bought one back from him. Here it is. It's a solitaire, and it's intended for an engagement ring. Will you wear it for me, Polly?"

Polly looked into the doctor's calm, tender eyes, then extended the third finger of her right hand.

"For Gawd's sake, put it on quick, Doc!" she said.

(The End.)



THERE'S a guy with a thin brush and a pot of gold paint markin' up the door of our offices as I come down the hall. Under where it says "Giles Confidential Detective Agency, Investigations Quietly Conducted, Rates Reasonable" he's

made the letters "C-O-L." Old Giles, who can just about sign his own name if somebody helps him hold the pen, is standin' behind the letter-artist tellin' him how much better that "C" would look if it only had a little longer curl at the end.

"Mornin', boss," I say as old Giles spots me. "May I inquire the purpose and intentions of the Frisco decorations? I'll admit the pitchers is pleasin', but—"

"Glad you come, Joe. Been waitin' for you," grins the boss. "I got somethin' important to tell you. Come inside," duckin' through the door. "Joe Conner," he tells me when we're sat by his desk, "we're in the way of makin' a pot full of money."

"It did look like rain when I got up this mornin'," I remark, "but it's clearin' up nice, and—"

"What're you talkin' about?" demands the boss, lookin' at me fierce.

"That 'we' stuff," I tells him. "Any time you've got a scheme by which we are goin' to clean up big, it turns out somehow that the only part of the we that gets theirs is yourself."

"Aw, Joe," he says, like he was hurt, "you know I always treat you fair."

"Oh, sure!" I say sarcastic. "You couldn't treat me better—not if you was my stepmother."

"Anyhow," he says, comin' back to the subject, "you seen what the artist was puttin' on the door."

"C-O-L," I tell him, "but what—"

"Don't you know what they're the first three letters of?"

"Well," I say, "it might be Colorado, or it might be cholera, or it might be collar-button, or—"

"Collections," he tells me.

"Hah?"

"Collections," he says, grinnin'. "The Giles Confidential Detective Agency is about to take up a side line—collections."

"Of what?" I ask. "Oil paintin's, or butterflies, or—"

"Bad debts," he says. "Yes, Joe, since our business in straight detective work—"

"Any detective work we ever did was never straight," I interrupt.

"—business in straight detective work," he goes on, payin' no attention to my dig, "is a little slow just now; we're going to branch out a little and collect money that's due people for—"

"Where do I fit in?" I ask.

"Oh," he says careless, "you're to be the collector."

"Oh, I am, eh? Well, just by way of gettin' a little practise, suppose you slip me the thirty-seven eighty-eight that you owe me for wages and expenses last week."

"Aw, Joe, you know I'm a little short, and—"

"Come across!" I order him threaten'-like. "If I can't collect money that's comin' to me personal, how am I goin' to get it for other people?"

He had the dough, and I knew it. After thinkin' for a minute he gives it to me, and we're friends again.

"O. K.," I say, sinkin' the coin. "Now get your story off your chest."

"Well," he says, "it's like this: Mr. Millard Fillmore Dugan, receiver for the bankrupt firm of Feinstein & Reilly—"

"That's the instalment plan furniture people?"

"Yes, Mr. Dugan called here yesterday afternoon and suggested that I use the facilities of my agency—"

"Meanin' Ed Taylor and me?" I suggest.

"Joe," says the boss real snappy, "I wish you'd cut out tellin' everybody that I've only got two detectives in my agency."

"I will," I promise. "You ain't got two detectives, anyhow; you only got one—me. You can't call Ed a detective, can you?"

"He's honest, anyways," says the boss, lookin' at me hard.

"No," I tell him, "just thick."

"Aw, shut up! Anyhow, Mr. Dugan wanted me to take up the work of collectin' the — the — er — outstandin' accounts of Feinstein & Reilly, and I said I would."

"Outstandin' accounts means money Feinstein & Reilly got beat out of."

"Well," admits the boss doubtful like, "I suppose you could put it that way."

"And you think you're goin' to make a pile of dough doin' it?"

"Why, of course. Mr. Dugan told me we ought to clear—"

"Bunk! If Feinstein & Reilly went broke on these outstandin' accounts, as you call them, where do you think you figure to—"

"That's what I want to talk to you about," says the boss.

"Oh!" I remark thoughtful. "As usual, I do the work, and you gather the jack!"

"Mr. Dugan has done most of the preliminary work for us," says the boss, takin' a little pile of blue cards from his desk.

"He's done everything, I suppose, but collect the money?"

"Yes."

"Kind of him, ain't it, to leave the softest part of the job for us—for me, I mean."

"These," says the boss, fiddlin' with the little blue cards, "is some of the outstandin' accounts. Mr. Dugan give me these to start off with. If we're successful in collectin' them we get all his business durin' his receivership."

"Let's see one," I ask him, holdin' out my hand.

He gives me the top one, and I read:

"YOU FURNISH THE BRIDE—WE FURNISH THE HOME"

ACCOUNT NO. 4356

FEINSTEIN & REILLY

8888 Eighth Ave.

Name: Michael P. Flanagan.

Address: 1892 Third Avenue.

Occupation: Boiler-maker.

Married: Yes.

GOODS PURCHASED:

One dining-room suite (8 pieces)...	\$296.60
One bedroom suite (4 pieces).....	83.95
One ice-box	11.32
One upright piano.....	110.00
One parlor lamp.....	6.45

\$508.32

Initial payment 50.00

Instalments paid: at \$10 per week.... 20.00

Balance due 438.32

Date of purchase: October 13, 1902.

Last instalment paid: February 14, 1903.

Remarks: Purchaser has persistently refused to pay instalments, frequently using threatening and abusive language to collectors.

"For the love I bear the noble game of stud poker!" I exclaim. "So this is what's known as an outstandin' account! I should say it is—over sixteen years since the guy paid any instalments. And you're hopin' to get some dough out of him now. Why, you're crazy! So is Millard Fillmore Dugan. The only sensible guys mixed up in this business is Feinstein & Reilly; they had brains enough to go bankrupt.

"Why, say, do you know where that furniture is now? Michael P. Flanagan's

grandchildren prob'ly chopped it up for firewood durin' the cold spell last winter. Honest, boss, do you, or Millard Fillmore Dugan, or Feinstein & Reilly expect for a minute that you're goin' to get a guy to pay for stuff that he's prob'ly forgot he ever bought? And did you get that stuff about the threatenin' and abusive language? No guy named Michael P. Flanagan is goin' to separate himself from any darby that he's dodged payin' for sixteen years just because I tell him to. How many more of these outstandin' accounts is like this one?" I ask, reachin' over for more cards.

"Don't!" orders the boss, grabbin' my wrist. "You'll mix the cards up."

"It can't hurt them none," I tell him. "Puttin' them in alphabetic order ain't goin' to make nobody pay for parlor furniture that's all wore out. Why, I'll bet three quarters of the people on them cards is dead."

"Joe, you don't understand—"

"I understand enough to know you can't collect no money from a guy that's lyin' under a stone with 'Rest in Peace' on it."

"Mr. Dugan told me—"

"I don't care what Mr. Dugan told you. I know what collectin' money is. Don't I have trouble enough makin' you pay me my wages?"

"Joe, Mr. Dugan admitted that most of these accounts is dead—legally dead. What we're to do is to bring 'em to life."

"With what—a pulmotor?"

"I'm serious," says the boss. "Most of these accounts is outlawed. That's because they're so old they have whiskers. We know that startin' out. But the law says if you can get a man that owes money to pay somethin'—even if it's only a buck—that makes the account active again, and—"

"Which cemetery do you think we ought to work first—Greenwood or Calvary?"

"As I was sayin'," goes on the boss, frownin' at me for gettin' rosy, "the payment of somethin' on account amounts to an acknowledgment of indebtedness which will permit the receiver to institute legal proceedin's to—"

"All that's as clear as the League of Nations," I butt in. "You don't know what

you're talkin' about no more than I do. You're just tryin' to repeat somethin' Dugan told you—and gettin' it all jazzed up."

The boss looks sore. "Anyhow," he says, "we're supposed to collect this money."

"There's that we again. You mean I am supposed to collect this money; all you do is cop the profits."

"No," says the boss, "you get your cut. Mr. Dugan gives me ten percent, and I split it fifty-fifty with you."

"Fair enough. Gimme some cards."

"You ought to go about this systematic," the boss informs me, pullin' the cards away.

"You ought to lay out a route, and—"

"Feinstein & Reilly prob'ly went about it systematic, and look where they fetched up. Gimme them cards, and let's go."

"Suit yourself," grunts the boss, knowin' I'd do it anyhow.

He gives me the cards, and I look over them quick. They made what a smarter guy than me would call an int'restin' study. I'll tell the world I wouldn't be workin' for five a day and expenses as a private dick if I was a business man, but, if Feinstein & Reilly's way of doin' business was correct, then I know a few things I could learn Rockefeller.

Judgin' from the cards, Feinstein & Reilly went into partnership to give furniture away. Imagine handin' anybody five hundred bucks' worth of stuff for fifty dollars down and ten dollars a week! I wouldn't trust the feller that put the word honesty in the language to pay a cent on anything he got under an arrangement like that; certainly I wouldn't expect him to cough up after the polish begins to wear off the piano and the drawers of the bureau begin to stick. The deepest and darkest mystery in the whole thing, as far as I could see, was how Feinstein & Reilly lasted in business as long as they did.

What I could read between the lines on the cards made me think that I might as well start with Michael P. Flanagan in takin' up my work as a collector. Not that I thought Mike was liable to prove soft pickin's. Oh, no! I doped Mike to be the toughest bird on the whole list. But I decided it was as well to learn the worst about the collectin' business first as last.

"Mike," I thought, lookin' at the card, "your name alone is enough to scare me. Your occupation and the habit of regular exercise you've contracted from pursuin' it, lead me to believe you're a stalwart and well-muscled gent. Since you was buyin' instalment-plan furniture sixteen years ago, I'd say you ought to be about in the prime of life now. The fact that Feinstein & Reilly let you alone, after collectin' twenty bucks on a five-hundred-dollar bill, makes me think you're a roarin', fightin' fool. All in all, I'm inclined to picture you as bein' able to lick any man in the world but Jack Dempsey. But Mike, old dear, you got to show *me*."

So I bid the boss good-by, and start out in search of Michael P. Flanagan. That job's right in my line, even if collectin' bad debts for furniture instalment-houses that went broke ain't.

And where do you think I look for Michael—at 1892 Third Avenue, the address that's on the card? Not on your life I don't. I figure that the guy that ain't willin' to pay for the bed he sleeps in ain't goin' to pay rent for the roof that covers him, either, and that Michael P. Flanagan's been dispossessed from 1892 Third Avenue years ago. It's for the public library I steer, where I surround myself with city directories datin' from the year 1902.

The story the directors told proved conclusive that I was right in assumin' that Mike changed his address about as often as the average man changes his undershirt. Michael P. Flanagan, boilermaker, was nabbed by the census-taker, say, every third year.

In 1905 he was over on Tenth Avenue. In 1909 his address was given on one of the lost highways of the Bronx. His abode was on East Eighty-Eighth Street in 1911, and in 1914 he was favorin' Columbus Avenue with his presence. Then he seemed to have disappeared. The directories after 1914 had plenty of Michael P. Flanagans, but none of them was boilermakers. I wrote the Columbus Avenue address on a slip of paper and went there.

There's no use of me tellin' you the particulars of my search for Mike's latest residence. It just consisted of me hoppin'

around town ringin' door-bells and askin', "Do you know Michael P. Flanagan?" and havin' people tell me, "He used to live here, but he moved to such and such a number so and so street."

So, cuttin' about a hundred miles of car-ridin' and walkin' out of a long story, 1 P.M. found me gazin' at the name Flanagan on the letter-box of a flat in West One Hundredth Street. It's on the top floor—four flights up.

"Well, Joe," I tell myself as I start up the stairs, "you're lucky at that. Friend Mike's prob'ly tappin' on boiler-rivets about now, which means that you ain't goin' to meet him but his missus. It's better so; this might be one of the days when Mike's feelin' threatenin' and abusive."

I rap on the door of the left-hand flat on the top floor. It opens sudden, and, if I wasn't pretty used to gettin' shocks in one form or another, I think I'd have fell all the way to the street.

The door is opened by Mike himself.

Leastwise it's opened by a red-faced, red-headed, red-mustached guy about eight feet tall, with a chest and shoulders like the front elevation of a court-house, and a look in his eye that reminded me of the cost of livin'. He's stripped for action, wearin' a woolen undershirt, a pair of loose blue pants and easy-lookin' house-slippers. In his mouth is a cob pipe, in which I'd say he was smokin' a mixture of wet wood shavin's and sulfur.

"Well," he roars in a voice that come all the way up from his toes, "what in blazes are *you* sellin'?"

"Joe," I says to myself, "if you let this bird see you're scared, your finish as a collector is goin' to come right now." So, although my teeth is chatterin', I look him up and down slow like for a minute and then bark at him:

"Say, you big stiff! Who d'you think you're talkin' to? Huh? You'll find out who I am and what I want soon enough. I got your number, Flanagan. You're a beat. Now cut out the beefin', and just come across with that money you owe Feinstein & Reilly."

I tip the beam at just a little over the welter-weight limit—about a hundred and

fifty, I'd say. As I talked, my eyebrows were even with the second button on Flanagan's shirt. All he had to do was to give me the flat of either one of his hands to take me out of his life forever.

But he didn't do it. He sticks both his big, red paws down the waist-band of his pants, kind of rocks back and forth in the slippers for a few seconds, and then grins at me.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" he says. "Ye cocky little-devil! Well, Flanagan's me name; ye got that right; but what's the meanin' o' the rest o' yer palaver? And would ye mind tellin' me who it is I'm supposed to be owin' the money to?"

"That soft stuff won't get you nothin', either, Flanagan," I growl at him. "Just come across with that dough. Come on, I'm in a hurry; I've got other calls to make."

"Easy, me boy, easy," says he. "Just take yer time, and ye'll be all right. Who was it now ye mentioned as bein' them I'm said to be owin' the money to?"

"Aw, you know blame well—Feinstein & Reilly."

"Feinstein & Reilly!" he repeats, like he was puzzled. "Feinstein &—well, I'll be blowed! Haw, haw, haw!" And he lets out a roar of laughter that shakes the house. He howls for a full minute, me standin' there lookin' at him. At last he stops, rubs the tears out of his eyes with one hand and beckons to me with the other.

"Come inside," he says. Then to himself: "Feinstein & Reilly! So they're around yet? I'll be blowed!—Say," he asks me suddenly, "how long ago was it I got that stuff from Feinstein & Reilly?"

"Aha!" I exclaim, stoppin' and pointin' my finger at him. "So you admit you got the stuff? You admit you owe Feinstein &—"

"Admit I owe them—hell!" he bellows. "Sure I got some stuff from them: a bed that busted down the third night it was slept in, some dinin'-room furniture that fell apart the first day it rained, a pianner that Padwhiskey himself couldn't 'a' got a tune out of, an ice-box that was made out of old newspapers and tomato-cans—a fine mess o' junk! Sure I got it, and I told Feinstein

& Reilly to take it to blazes out o' me house two months after they put it in, and they wouldn't, but kept sendin' 'round their dummed collectors till they near drove me mad. Now, if what ye're here for is to get the stuff, I might as well tell ye that it's been in the city dump these fifteen year'. It wasn't—"

"Huh!" I broke in. "A fine line of bull you got. But you don't get away with it, Flanagan. Not with me, you don't. Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, knock-in' a re-putable business concern like Feinstein & Reilly. You know as well as I do that their goods was the best on the market—absolutely the best. They trusted you, Flanagan, and what did you do? You betrayed the trust, took advantage of Feinstein & Reilly's kindness, and stole their furniture. That's what you done, Flanagan; you stole from them. You're a thief! You're—"

"It's a thief I am, is it?" says he, grinnin'. "I pay them—more than sixty bucks it was—for a collection of junk that wasn't worth ten. I tell them to take their dummed stuff out o' me sight, and they won't; and it's a thief they call me! Haw, haw, haw!"

"You can't laugh it off with me, Flanagan," I snap. "You'll come across with the dough you owe Feinstein & Reilly, or—"

"Or—what?" he growls in a way that suddenly makes me remember his height, weight and generally forbiddin' exterior.

"Or—or—" I stammer.

"Go on; I'm listenin'," he says, grinnin'.

"Or I'll lock you up," I threaten, that bein' the first thing I could think of.

"Lock me up, is it?" he repeats, his grin growin' wider. "Lock me up, eh? Ye'd lock me up, would ye?"

"The devil!" I say to myself. "Why did I tell him that? He prob'ly knows I ain't got no right to lock him up." But to him I growl fierce as I can: "Yes, I'd lock you up. I'd do it in a minute—if the judge said so."

"What judge?" he says quick like.

"Why—er—Judge Giles," I tell him, thinkin' maybe the boss could help me out.

"Judge Giles?" he asks, lookin' interested. "Where's his court?"

"He's a—er—that is—I mean he's a—a

receiver's judge." I'm beginnin' to get dizzy. "Yes, that's what he is—a receiver's judge, and his court is—say, look here, Flanagan," I yelp, "I didn't come here to answer questions for you. What I come here for was coin. You owe Feinstein & Reilly four hundred and thirty-eight dollars and thirty-two cents," I tell him after consultin' the card. "I want that kale. You been stallin' with me long enough; it's time now to come across. How much are you goin' to pay me?"

"Not a damn cent!" he says, almost before the words are out of my mouth.

"What! You defy Judge Giles! You refuse to—"

"Not one cent!" he repeats, stern but easylike. Then he sits there lookin' at me for a few seconds. "Well," he asks at last, "what're ye goin' to do about it?"

"Why, er—"

"Ain't ye goin' to arrest me?"

"Aw, say, Flanagan," I exclaim, stallin'. "A feller like you don't want to be pinched. Think of the disgrace to your family. Think how your little ones would feel to see their father dragged out—"

"Dragged out!" he interrupts, laughin' at me. "If ye see anybody around here that's goin' to drag me out o' any place, ye've got better eyes than I have."

"Don't make things no worse for yourself by threatenin' an officer," I warn him.

"I ain't threatenin'," he says meek like. "I'm just tellin' ye I ain't payin' no money to Feinstein & Reilly. If that means I got to be arrested," he adds, looking real heroic, "let the law take its course. I'll go along quiet with ye."

"Gee, Flanagan!" I'm gettin' scared now. Suppose I do have to go through with my bluff of arrestin' this bird? What am I goin' to do with him? Where am I goin' to take him? "I don't want to arrest you," I tell him. "I don't want to spoil any guy's career by puttin' him behind the bars. You can save yourself this awful disgrace by payin' Feinstein & Reilly. Even if you can't pay the whole bill," I suggest, "you might just give me a few bucks. That'd show you mean to pay—"

"But I don't mean to pay!" he informs me.

"Well," I sigh, "I guess there ain't nothin' for me to do but—"

"But arrest me," he says.

"Yes."

"All right," he comes back, cheerful as you please. "Wait till I get dressed. Here, have a cigar while ye're waitin'," he invites me, offerin' a box of wicked ones. "I'll be right with ye," he promises, gettin' up and movin' out of the room.

My head was spinnin' around like the propeller of an ayreoplane.

A fine mess I'd got myself into! This guy Flanagan, good-natured and decent as he'd been durin' all our talk, prob'ly would sink my skull in as soon as he found out I was just bluffin' when I threatened to arrest him, and that I hadn't no more right to arrest anybody than he had. But why was he takin' my threat of arrestin' him so easy?

"The son of a gun figgers I'm bluffin'!" I decided after thinkin' it over. "He's just kiddin' me; seein' how far I'll go. All right, Mr. Michael P. Flanagan, we'll see who can bluff hardest. If you got any scare in you, I'm goin' to bring it out, or my name ain't Joe Conner."

While I'm so thinkin' Flanagan comes back. He's put on his Sunday suit and a collar and tie, and in them looks about four stories bigger than the Woolworth Buildin'.

"Are ye ready?" he asks me.

"I am," I tell him quick. "Look here, Flanagan, this is your last chance. If you got any regard for your reputation and the feelin's of your family, you won't force me to do my duty. You'll dig down and pay me somethin' of that outstandin' account of yours with Feinstein & Reilly. Just a couple of bucks will do the trick and keep me from takin' you before Judge Giles. The judge is a hard citizen; he'll land on you like a thousand of brick."

"I'll take me chances with him," grins Flanagan.

"You won't pay—"

"Not a damn cent! Come on; arrest me!"

"All right," I say like it breaks my heart to do it. "Better say good-by to your family, Flanagan; you may be gone a long time."

"I've told me missus," says he, "and

she says she thinks it's awful to arrest a man for—"

"So do I," I tell him. "That's why I want you to pay some money and spare yourself and your wife the shame of—"

"Let's tell it to the judge," he interrupts.

I folley him out, and down the four flights to the street. On the way I'm wonderin' if maybe I hadn't ought to run for it. I was seein' movies already of this guy Flanagan tearin' my arms and legs out by the roots as soon as he tumbled to the fact that I didn't have no court or no station-house to take him to.

Why didn't I just threaten to seize his furniture? He might have fell for that, or it might have scared his wife into makin' him pay me some money. Anyways, it would have given me my chance to make a getaway after speakin' my piece.

We go down the street real slowlike.

"Flanagan," I say at last, "I been thinkin' your case over. I like you, Flanagan; you're a good feller. I'm thinkin' maybe there's somethin' I could do with the judge for you. Maybe he won't want me to lock you up. I'll call him up," I say, spottin' a telephone-sign on the corner store. "Come on in; we'll see what he has to say."

I get the boss on the phone.

"Judge Giles?" I say.

"Judge Giles!" he repeats. "No, there ain't no Judge Giles here. This is the Giles Con—"

"This is Conner, judge," I tell him.

"What's the idea of the 'judge' stuff?" he inquires.

"Why, I'll tell you, judge," I say, "I got that feller Flanagan—the one that beat Feinstein & Reilly out of all that dough. He says he won't pay nothin', and I've pinched him. He's a good feller, judge; he ain't the kind you'd want to send up the river or—"

"What in blazes are you talkin' about?" asks the boss.

"That's just what I told him, judge," I say back. "Wait a minute." I cover the phone with my hand and turn to Flanagan. "The judge says he can't do nothin' for you," I tell him, "unless you pay me some money. He says if you keep on refusin' to pay he'll have to give you the limit."

"I ain't goin' to pay," says Flanagan.

"Aw, judge!" I say back into the 'phone. "Have a heart! You don't want to send a man like this to jail. He's got a wife and a houseful of kids and—"

"Have you gone looney?" the boss snaps. "What's all this bunk you're talkin'?"

"Oh, so that's the way it is!" I exclaim, cursin' old Giles for not gettin' the cue. He's thick that way, the boss is. The only way you can get anything into his skull is by drillin' a hole and pourin' it in through a funnel. "So that's the way it is, eh? I got to bring him in, eh?"

"Got to bring *who* in?" the boss demands. "For cat's sake, what are you talkin' about?"

"Oh, you'll let him off if he pays me some money?" I say. "Did you hear that?" I ask Flanagan. "He says I can let you go now if you pay me somethin' on account—just a couple of bucks."

"He ain't such a tough judge at that!" grins Flanagan.

"Then you're goin' to pay?" I ask, hopeful.

"Not much I ain't!"

"Gee, judge," I say into the 'phone, "this here is a sad case—a sick wife, a dozen little kids—"

"I have not!" butts in Flanagan. "Me old woman is as strong as a horse, and me only boy is workin'."

"What!" I exclaim, pretendin' to be all excited at somethin' that came over the 'phone. "You'd give him—ten years! Great guns, Flanagan!" I gasp. "You ain't goin' lose ten years out of your life—just for the sake of a few dollars!"

"I want to tell me story to the judge," says Flanagan.

"Well, judge," I tell the boss, "I guess there's nothing to do but arraign this guy before you. I'll ask you, though, as a kind-hearted man who's a father yourself, not to be too hard on him, but to remember your own little ones."

"I don't know what kind of monkeydoodle business you're pullin' there," says the boss, "but I'm thinkin' you must be out of your nut! Who is it that you're goin' to bring here, and why?"

"I told him all that," I say. "Well," I

kind of groan, "I'm sorry to bother you, judge, but we'll be right down."

I hang up the receiver and turn to Flanagan with a sad face.

"If you ain't got no money now," I suggest, "maybe I could fix it with the judge to let you go until you're paid again."

"I got plenty of money," says Flanagan.

"Then why don't you give me some?"

"None of yer business! I'll tell the judge all about me case, and let him—"

"He'll send you up the river—sure!"

"I'll take me chances. Let's go to court and get it over with."

Well, if there was any chance of duckin' between there and the office I'd have done it. Flanagan, though, kept as close to me as the tail of my shirt. I couldn't shake him—not even in the subway. You'd have thought it was him that was arrestin' me.

The sweat was pourin' off me when we got to the office. Old Giles is about as bright as a lead pipe, and I had no way of knowin' what kind of a bone he was liable to pull on me to queer the gag I'd started with Flanagan. The big guy's easy way of takin' things sure had me worried. If he didn't get scared into handin' over some money when I sprung the boss on him as "judge" the jig was sure up! I could picture him pickin' me up with one hand and the boss with the other and gently droppin' us out into the street as soon as he found out that all my talk about courts and prisons was just hokum.

I open the door of the office, and, before the boss can say a word, I've got my arm around his neck and I'm leadin' him over to the corner.

"Got to see you private, judge!" I tell him. "Say, listen!" I whisper. "I've told this guy you're Judge Giles, and that you're goin' to send him up the river if he don't come across with the dough he owes Feinstein and Reilly. As you value your life—act the part! This bird will kill us if he finds out he's bein' bamboozled."

"But what—"

"Act like a judge! I don't care how you do it—but do it! Help me scare some dough out of this feller!"

For the first time in his long and dishonorable career the boss shows signs of almost

human intelligence. He whirls around and glares at Flanagan.

"Why don't you pay what you owe?" he bawls.

"I don't owe nothin'!" says Flanagan.

"Wipe that smile off'n your face!" barks the boss. "All right; court's open. What's this man charged with, officer?" he asks me.

"Defraudin' and swindlin' Feinstein & Reilly out of near five hundred bucks' worth of furniture."

"Oh!" shrieks the boss. "Terrible! What's your name?" he asks Flanagan.

"Flanagan—Michael P. Flanagan," says our prisoner, still grinnin'.

"Have you anything to say before sentence is pronounced on you?" roars the boss.

"Sentence!" exclaims Flanagan.

"Silence in the court!" yells the boss, poundin' on his desk. "Have you anything to say?" he roars again.

"Well, mister—" begins Flanagan.

"I ordered silence in the court!" the boss yells at him. "Detective Conner," he says to me, "this man has refused to pay what he owes?"

"He has, judge, but—"

"Take him away!" barks the boss.

"Away!" I gasp. "Where?"

"Put him behind the bars!"

"Aw, say, judge—give him a chance, won't you?"

"He's had his chance. Take him away!"

"Gee, judge," I beg, desperate, "can't you let this guy think it over? Maybe if you reason with him—"

"He can think it over in jail!" snaps the boss. "Take him away!"

The grin has never left Flanagan's face.

"Well," he says to me, "ye've heard what the judge said."

"Don't give up hope," I whisper to him. "I may be able to fix it yet. Gimme some dough, can't you, you boob? Then it 'll be all right."

"Nothin' stirrin'!" says he.

"The devil!" I tell him. "I don't want to take you to jail."

"I know dummed well ye don't!" he laughs.

"You're the first guy I ever seen that wanted to go behind the bars."

"I guess I am a queer one," he admits.

"Well, officer," he says, holding out his mitts as though for handcuffs, "do your duty!"

"Judge," I say to the boss, "I like this—this prisoner. I don't want to see him in the cooler. Maybe," I suggest, "if I pay a couple of bucks on his account you'll let him—"

"No!" screams the boss. "I've give him his sentence—kale or jail!"

"But, judge—"

"Take him away!" commands the boss. "If you don't, I hold you for contempt of court."

"Couldn't you let this guy out on bail?" I ask. "I'll put up enough dough—"

"No! Unless he pays what he owes himself, he sleeps in a cell to-night."

"Say!" It's Flanagan talkin' now. "It's nice of ye," he tells me, "to try and get me out of this scrape, but I guess ye can't do nuthin' with the judge. Take me to jail as he says."

I start to edge toward the door. I'd have made it, too, and ducked out, except for Flanagan. The big guy grabs me by the arm.

"Goin'?" he asks me. "All right; I'm ready. Good-by, judge," he says to the boss.

"If you change your mind about payin' before you reach the lockup," says the boss, "give the money to Officer Conner."

"I will," promises Flanagan; "if I change me mind."

When we get to the street I speak to Flanagan real serious.

"Flanagan," I say, "as I've said before, I like you. I think you're a good feller and I hate to see you in trouble. I'm goin' to let you go home," I tell him. "I ain't goin' to take you to jail. I'll take a chance on you. In a week or so I'll drop around to see you again, and maybe then you'll have some money to give me. I'll walk you over to the subway, and then you can—"

"Nothin' doin'!" says Flanagan. "I've been ordered to jail, and to jail I'm goin'. I think I can beat this case," he tells me. "Some other judge may not be as hard on me as the old guy up-stairs."

"Well," I say, "there's no use of us goin' to jail yet. Let's take a walk."

What I was lookin' for was a place with

a big crowd where I could duck away from Flanagan and lose him. My thoughts on the collectin' business about then wasn't of the kind you could repeat in anybody's hearin'.

"All right," agrees Flanagan, grabbin' me by the arm. "We walk."

And we did—ten miles if we went a foot. For a big guy this Flanagan was some pedestrian! Also, he queered my little plan of losin' him in the crowd by holdin' onto my arm as though I was *his* prisoner. The thicker the crowd we found, the harder he held on. Losin' either one of my legs was a simple task compared with shakin' off his boiler-maker's grip.

We went all through the financial district, walked through Battery Park, had a look at the Aquarium, strolled up West Street, wandered through Greenwich Village and at last found ourselves in front of Jefferson Market Court.

"Well," says Flanagan, "there's a lock-up here; let's go in."

"No! No!" I cried. "Not here! They don't take your kind of cases here."

"Oh, they don't, eh?" he grinned. "Well, where do they take them?"

"Further up-town," I told him.

"All right," Flanagan nods. "Let's go up-town."

We walk up Sixth Avenue to Forty-second Street. There Flanagan hauls out his watch.

"H'm!" he comments. "We got to hurry."

"Hurry! Why?"

"If we don't, we'll be late," he tells me.

"Late! For what?"

"You'll see," he predicts, haulin' me toward the Elevated station.

"Hey, wait!" I try to tell him. "I don't want to ride; let's keep on walkin'."

He don't make no reply; just drags me up the stairs and we get aboard a Harlem train.

"Where are we goin'?" I inquired.

"You'll see," he tells me, grinnin'.

"You want to remember you're my prisoner, and—"

"I know it," he says.

"Well, you ought to do what I say then. I don't want to ride; I want to—"

"Oh, yes, ye do!" he grins. "Ye need a rest after all yer walkin'."

The train rattles north to the Ninety-ninth Street station. There Flanagan, who's running the whole show, announces that we're to get off.

"Oh," I say, hopeful, "you're goin' home. You're goin' to take my suggestion of layin' low until you have some money to give me."

"Maybe," he laughs. "But first we're goin' to see some friends o' mine."

"Friends of yours! Who?"

"Ye'll see soon," he grins. "Come along."

He strengthens the grip he already has on my arm and leads me along the street. My bean wasn't in any condition to receive impressions about the route we was takin'. I stumbled along in a daze. We might as well have been in China for all I knew about what was goin' on around me.

Suddenly I wake up to the fact that we've stopped. I look around me, and the first thing my eyes light on is—a green lamp. We're in front of a police station!

"Flanagan," I say, suddenly comin' out of my trance, "as I've told you before, I don't want to deliver you up to the law. Be sensible, man—just hand me a couple of bucks, I'll mark it off what you owe Feinstein & Reilly, and I'll let you go."

"Nothin' doin'!" he laughs. "I insist that ye take me into this station-house!"

"You're forcin' me to do somethin' that hurts me," I object.

"I know it," says he, pullin' me closer to him and draggin' me up the steps, "but I wouldn't have ye dodge doin' yer duty."

I squirm and twist as near like an eel as I can, but years of boiler-makin' has made Flanagan's good right arm too strong to yield to any strength that I have. The lieutenant at the desk looks up as he hears us wrasslin' across the floor.

"Well, Patrolman Flanagan," he inquires, when we've reached the rail, "what have we here?"

Patrolman Flanagan! I think I fainted. Anyway that station-house started to whirl around like a carousel. There was a buzz in my ears and the lieutenant at the desk suddenly turned into a long line of husky

cops, all bigger than Flanagan even, who were rushin' at me swingin' their nightsticks. I couldn't even feel Flanagan's big fingers pressin' into my arm.

Then the buzz suddenly cleared up, and I discovered it was merely Flanagan talkin' in his deep bass. What I thought was the cops with nightsticks was only the lieutenant raisin' a pen from its rack.

"He come to my house," Flanagan was sayin', "said he was a cop and put me under arrest. I'm makin' a charge of impersonatin' an officer ag'in' him!"

Right away both my feet are on the ground. No wonder Flanagan was so easy and gentle with me all afternoon! No wonder he'd insisted on me arrestin' him! He had an ace in the hole all the time. There he was, seein' how far I'd go with him, laughin' up his sleeve at me and just waitin' for a chance to haul me into a station-house and have me pinched.

"It's a lie!" I yell at the lieutenant. "I didn't impersonate no officer. I just told this big stiff he ought to be arrested—and he ought. Think of it—refusin' to pay a just debt for sixteen years. Is that the kind of a guy that ought to be protectin' the lives and property of our citizens? A feller that won't pay what he owes ain't goin' to—"

"Ahem!" interrupts the lieutenant. "There seems to be two sides to this story. What's this debt you say Patrolman Flanagan owes?"

"It's almost five hundred bucks," I say, "for house furnishin's he bought from Feinstein & Reilly."

"How about that, Patrolman Flanagan," asks the lieutenant severe like.

"Aw, the stuff was no good!" growls Flanagan. "I told them to take it away."

"Well, of course," breaks in the lieutenant, "your private affairs are none of my business, Patrolman Flanagan, except that I ought to warn you that an officer of the law certainly should satisfy any obligation he contracts. But that's aside from the case. If this young man claimed to be a policeman—"

"I didn't!" I yelled.

"He did!" charged Flanagan.

"—if he claimed to be a policeman," the lieutenant continues, "that's a serious mat-

ter and I can do nothing but hold him on your charge."

"I didn't claim to be a policeman!" I insisted. "I just told this big—that is, Patrolman Flanagan that he ought to pay what he owes Feinstein & Reilly, and he—"

"Just a second," says the lieutenant, holdin' up his hand. "What is it, madam?" he asks, lookin' over our heads.

I turn around and see a nice-lookin', stoutish, neat-dressed woman walkin' toward the desk.

"Is Officer Flanagan here?" she asks. "He forgot his— Oh, there you are, Mike!" she exclaims, spottin' Flanagan. She reaches into her hand-bag. "You walked-out to-day without your badge," she says, pullin' a cop's shield out of the bag. "I thought you'd need it when you went on duty and—"

"All right, Molly; thanks!" says Flanagan, grabbin' his shield. "Run along home now; I'm awful busy here."

The woman turns to go. The lieutenant raises his eyebrows like he was askin' me a question, and I go on from where I was interrupted.

"As I was sayin'," I tell the lieutenant, "I told Officer Flanagan he ought to pay me the money he owes Feinstein & Reilly, and he—"

"What's that?" sounds a voice behind me.

I stop, and turn to see the woman who'd given Flanagan the shield walkin' toward me. Her eyes is wide open and there's a queer expression on her face.

"What's that you're sayin'?" she asks.

"What's that about my husband—about Officer Flanagan owin' money to—"

"He owes near five hundred bucks to Feinstein & Reilly for furniture."

"But he can't!" she snaps. "We only bought a little more than five hundred dollars' worth, and we paid for it years ago, didn't we, Michael?"

"Sure! Sure! Of course, we did!" says Flanagan, lookin' kind of woozy.

"Not accordin' to this you didn't!" I tell her, takin' the card that held the details of Flanagan's transaction with Feinstein & Reilly out of my pocket. "Look here,"

I show her, "there's only seventy dollars been—"

The woman takes one glance at the card; then she bounds over to Flanagan.

"Michael Flanagan," she says, lookin' at him hard, "how is it that—Oho!" she exclaims suddenly. "I see! Why, you big bum!" she almost shrieks, wavin' her finger in Flanagan's face. "You—you crook! You took the money from me to pay that bill—and you never done it! Captain," she tells the lieutenant, "regularly, every week, I gave this big loafer ten or fifteen dollars out of his wages to pay that bill, and he—how much does he owe?" she asks, turnin' to me.

"Four thirty-eight, thirty-two," I tell her after consultin' the card.

"Very well!" she says, her teeth comin' together with a click. "You'll get your money—every cent of it! Out of his spendin' money," she explains, pointin' to Flana-

gan, who, for all his size, is tremblin' like a little kid that's about to be spanked. "Just come to see me," she tells me, "twice a month, after he's been paid, and I'll have the money for you. Oh, you—you—" She can't think of a word to call Flanagan. "I'll fix you—later!" she promises, shakin' her fist at Flanagan and rushin' out of the station-house.

The lieutenant covers his mouth with his hand, but it doesn't hide the smile that's in his eyes. "Patrolman Flanagan," he says, "this charge of yours—"

"Withdrawn!" bawls Flanagan. "But if this little shrimp don't get out of here," he growls, steppin' toward me, "he'll have a charge to make against me—for assault and battery!"

I break all records gettin' to the "L" station. Twenty-three eight-six my first day's work as a collector netted me, which I'll say ain't bad at all—for an amateur!

BALLADE OF OLD FRANCE

AH! Life went well in olden France,
And every day seemed an April day,
When belle and beau tripped through the dance,
Light of heart in a youthful way.
Bright were the ladies in fine array;
They asked for love—and nothing more;
Life was a song, a lyric gay,
Back in the days of the Pompadour.

High was the spirit of old romance—
A kiss meant something more than play;
A Louis gave his lass a glance,
And a winter's night was a dream of May.
"Caprice! Coquettes!" I hear you say;
"In such frail love we set no store!"
But are you and I as true as they,
Back in the days of the Pompadour?

For love of a maid one drew his lance,
And swift the price his foe would pay;
The jester's smile or the fool's advance
Was cause enough for a fearful fray,
For passions then no man could stay.
Yet "Flirt!" and "Fraud!" you whisper o'er;
But would we had lived, I often pray,
Back in the days of the Pompadour!

ENVOY.

Princess, as we grow old and gray,
I love to think of those times of yore,
Dreaming that somehow we are astray,
Back in the days of the Pompadour!

Charles Hanson Towne.

Crossroads

A SEQUEL TO "LUCK"

by John Frederick

Author of "Luck," "The Hammer," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

DIX VAN DYCK was a whimsical gunman with a smiling eye and a deadly right hand. If he hated anything he despised greasers, who usually furnished him with sufficient entertainment to vary the monotony of his existence in the town of Guadalupe. But when Don Porfirio Onate became sheriff Dix hit the trail, for the reason that he had inconsiderately caused the demise of three braves sent by Onate to kill him in revenge for an insult.

So in due time Van Dyck came to Double Bend, and to the dance-hall of Jerry Conklin. There he met Jack, or Jacqueline, an Amazon of rare appeal, but about whom there was raised a wall of superstition. The cross she wore spelled death for all who sought her friendship, while bringing good fortune to its wearer. Jack was the daughter of Boone, dead chieftain of an outlaw band broken up by McGurk, a "killer"—one surviving member of the gang, however, having survived and gone East. And the wonder of it was: Jack had tamed McGurk!

But Dix was stubborn—a perverse impulse prompted him to seek her acquaintance, and after he had killed a Mexican trailer of Onate's, thus for the time breaking the dread spell of the talisman—together with Jack he sought refuge in the desert. There, Jack said, they were safe from pursuit by Sheriff Glasgow, of Double Bend.

Then, cold to all men, Jack received Dix's advances with anger. Finally, to his suggestion that they travel northward together, she said suddenly:

"Van Dyck, are you talking to me as man to man, or as man to woman?"

He hesitated; then he said:

"If it's man to man, you'll go with me, Jack?"

"Right! Tell me straight, Van Dyck."

And the truth came to his lips. It came and formed itself in words, surprising the speaker more than she who listened.

CHAPTER VIII.

PLAIN TRAILS.

"IT'S man to woman, Jack!"

A pause came. Now that he had spoken his mind swirled as he examined the appalling truth.

"I kind of thought so," said the girl, "I'm sorry."

And he answered: "So'm I. Damned sorry, Jack."

"I was hoping," she said wearily, "that we *could* be pals."

"So was I," he said faintly.

She stood up.

"I'm going to turn in."

"I'll sit here by the fire a while."

"Better not. You'll have a pile of riding to do to-morrow."

"But I got a pile of thinking to do right now."

"All right. Good-night, Van Dyck."

Her hand went out to him. He shook it gravely, with a reverent touch, and afterward, with a vacant eye watched her preparations for the night. They were quickly made, and almost at once she lay wrapped in her blanket with her boots under her head. He bowed his forehead against his hands and pondered the situation gloomily. He was trying to retrace the course of the rough banter which had led him, at last, to this strange exposé of his own emotions.

Then vague conjecture filled his mind, of what she would do, and of how she would act toward him in the morning. He was in the position, in a way, of one who has striven to take the fort by storm, and being repulsed he must content himself with laboriously laying siege to the place and waiting for days and weeks and even months to tell. These thoughts in turn grew dim in his mind.

A pain in his back suddenly recalled him.

This story began in The Argosy for January 31.

He found that he had fallen asleep and must have sat in that cramped position for hours. Already the gray of the dawn was outlining the eastern hills. Every movement was a pain as he rose and stretched his limbs; the blood came tingling back, and he laughed at his own folly.

Then he turned to see if Jack was smiling silently at him. But she was gone. Perhaps she was foraging for wood with which to rekindle the fire.

She was not there. He turned with a frown and swept the ravine up and down in search of her, but nowhere was there the glimmer of the white horse.

Still scowling, he gathered an armful of dry wood and started the fire freshly; perhaps she had gone for an early morning canter. Then, as the light flared, he glimpsed something white which stirred and fluttered under a rock.

It was a jagged corner of paper, and on it, scrawled almost illegibly as if it had been written by firelight, he read:

Keep straight up the valley; follow the river north on the other side of the mountains. I ain't leaving because I don't like you but because I like you too well. JACK.

He read it over once. He read it twice. He read it again before the full meaning trickled like light into his brain—light through a keyhole. Then he swore, softly, steadily as running water. Once more his gaze swung around the horizon, but he could not even guess. She might have gone toward any point of the compass.

And Dix Van Dyck felt the most tremendous loneliness of his life. It welled up in him like water—it brimmed him to the throat. In such rocky ground it would be very hard to trail her. He stared up at the mountains as if they could speak to him.

One by one and range by range, they were swinging up out of the purples of night and on their highest summit already there was a stain of rose and a stain of yellow—indiscriminate splotches of color startlingly vivid, as if a giant and invisible paint-brush were smearing them, at random.

But they were all unknown, all strange faces which looked down at him. He knew at once that he could never trace her in this

rock wilderness. The very fact filled him with a limitless desire to find her—a strange mixture of emotions.

Not love, exactly, but something like it. It was rather the sense of loss which comes to the prospector when he makes a rich strike, goes away for provisions, and returns to find that he has lost the location of his treasure—a lost mine in the desert. Men have been known to waste their lives following some such intangible clue, and Dix Van Dyck had this possibility of waste in him. The blood of the prospector who will follow the hope of a brave to-morrow across the desert year after year, rejoicing in the search rather than in the finding, was his blood.

What Jack meant to him was merely a definite goal toward which he might strive. The energy which he had dissipated in a thousand careless and reckless ways now centered toward one purpose; she was his vanished mine, his lost treasure. She was priceless because she was unknown, guessed at. Her beauty, her strangeness, the singular superstition which surrounded and accompanied her, all had a part in making him turn toward her.

He set himself methodically to discover a way in which he might capture her again. It was, in the first place, obvious that he could never outstrip that glorious white stallion she rode. Even if he could it was equally certain that he could never trace her through an unfamiliar country where the hand of the law might be lying in wait for him at any turn.

One hold, it seemed, he possessed over her, however intangible it might be. She liked him. Perhaps she liked him for somewhat the same reasons that he liked her—because he was different, unknown to her either by type of example.

He had often stalked young antelope, lying prone in the grass within their sight and raising now and then a foot and leg to show over the top of the verdure. The antelope would stand watching the strange appearance with bright, fascinated eyes, and then come a little closer to examine it. Always they kept on, with a curiosity greater than their caution, until at last they were within easy shooting distance.

And he felt now, in the same way, that he had only to remain there quiet and at length the girl would circle back to the place. Yet this might mean a delay of days and days and in the meantime the hounds of the law would be on his track. Moreover, the one thing in the world which he could least endure was inaction.

It was on this account that he chose the least promising way of reaching her. He skirted about among the rocks until he found the trail of her horse as she had ridden from the camp. Small, short steps they were at first, and the traces of the girl's boots went alongside.

Apparently she had led the horse for a short distance from the place where Dix slept by the fire, and she had checked back the stallion so that his steps would fall lightly on the rock. In a little way, however, the double track ceased. The four prints of a standing horse were plain and deep in a piece of sand. Here she had mounted. Then the steps of the horse grew wider apart and more distinct. She had gone on from here at a trot.

The direction was straight across the ravine, at right-angles to the course she had told him to pursue up the valley, across the mountains, and then following the river to the north. Dix Van Dyck growled to himself. Certainly she had intended to leave him in the lurch. He fastened his eyes on the rocky side of the ravine and trotted his horse up the steep slope.

The signs were not hard to follow. The iron shoes of the stallion, striking the rock, chopped off little fragments which blazed away as plain to the practised eye of Dix Van Dyck as if the course had been marked in ink across white paper.

He came now, however, upon a harder strata of rock where a glass would be necessary to follow the imprints even of iron shoes. But at this point the trail wound sharply to the right as if the rider had swerved from the hard rocks by preference and chosen a course along the gravel at the side. This swerving trail puzzled Dix Van Dyck deeply. For it was most unusual for a rider of the desert to change a course because of so slight an obstacle. Particularly when riding a shod horse.

However, he did not waste time in wonder. He was too interested in the fresh trail. By the way the sand had drifted in upon the tracks, blurring them under the drive of the brisk wind, she could not have passed that way more than three hours before. His heart looked up with hope.

In this manner he came to the crest of the ridge along the left side of the cañon—a sharp crest dipping down on the further side almost as abruptly as it rose from the first valley. Just past the summit the trail veered sharply to the left and stopped in a maze of signs. It was a great slab of reddish stone, of copper coloring, but even that hard surface had taken a numerous imprint. In a hundred places the stone was marked, and as he read the sign, the horse had several times turned round and round here, as if chafing under a restraint which held him here for an appreciable interval. Examining the ground at the edges of the rock, he caught the imprint of the girl's boot. She had dismounted here, then. And the track was very fresh—not more than an hour old, as far as he could judge, though even the most experienced, he knew, often go astray in such matters.

Why she should stop here when she was barely started on her way he could not by any means imagine. A brief halt might be explained in a hundred ways, but here she must have kept the nervous, restive stallion for a full hour, or even more. Such marks could not have been made in a much shorter period. Finally, he saw on a gravelly ledge a place where she had sat down.

Most certainly her actions were strange. He was so perturbed in the effort to unravel the meaning that he swung from his horse and sat down on the identical ledge where she must have been only a short time before. Then light broke upon him.

For from that position, looking between two low ridges of rock at his left, he found himself staring down past the tops of the cottonwoods and onto the exact site of his late camp. There was still a faint column of smoke wavering up from the fire which he had hastily extinguished with sand—a slender mark against the atmosphere no more distinct than the tracery of a slate pencil over a slate.

She had stopped her horse in the shelter of the ridge and sat there to look back on the camp. She had seen him waken and stir about. She had waited there still until she saw him take the trail after her. Did it mean that she actually expected him to follow her? Was that the meaning of the plain trail she had left?

He started up with an exclamation and swung into the saddle. Plain as writing down the slope her trail continued. He galloped along it with a reckless speed.

CHAPTER IX.

ONATE TALKS INFORMALLY.

IN the capital city of the state Sheriff Onate was a personage to be sought out and flattered with ceremonious greetings. For the vast majority of the electorate in that state was Mexican, and among the Mexicans Sheriff Onate was a man of sorts. They admired him for a pomp of presence and a grace of manner which no white man west of the Mississippi could rival.

Represented by a man of such dignity, they felt confident he would get for them all they might wish. It is true that Sheriff Onate did not achieve much in the way of arrests, but his own small office was an insignificant matter. What really counted was his position in the state.

It was known that if he dropped a word in the ear of the governor action was apt to result. What number of votes Onate controlled even he himself could not estimate. At least it ran up into the thousands. Accordingly, in the capital men listened when he spoke. He was more revered in a lobby of the legislature than he was in his office in Guadalupe.

The time of his coming was particularly well chosen. For the state election was within striking distance, and Governor Boardman, though he had lined his pockets comfortably during his term, was not yet in such a position that he could build a certain white-verandaed house which he had in mind. Accordingly there was probably no one in the entire city so glad to see the great sheriff as was the governor himself.

All of this the sheriff knew perfectly well.

He knew also that in his heart the governor hated the ground upon which he walked, and this merely increased the satisfaction of the benign Onate. Straight to the offices of the governor he walked; walked, for he wished that many men might see him coming. That night many invitations to dine would wait for him at his hotel.

The man in the outer office had red hair and a pug-nose. He was a newcomer, also. For both reasons his reception of Onate was far from cordial, for he saw in the smoky whites of Onate's eyes that the man was of Indian blood. And the Irish remain the Irish the world around. He told the sheriff to sit down and wait his turn. Whereat the cheeks of the sheriff swelled with poisonous anger.

Luckily, the private secretary passed through the outer office at that moment. The effusiveness of his greeting made amends, in some degree. With one eye Onate enjoyed it; with the other he relished the red-faced discomfort of the pug-nosed Irishman. And he followed the secretary into the inner sanctum.

The governor had just signed an important letter, and was screwing back the gold-chased cover of his pen while he pondered deeply whether or no he had made his terms a little too cheaply with a certain corporation.

At sight of the sheriff he rolled to his feet. Literally rolled, for he was a very plump little man, and slid into and out of a chair with a singular undulatory motion. His pudgy hand met the soft palm of Onate, and they smiled upon one another. If the color of their skins was different the color of their hearts was the same.

"I have called—" began Sheriff Onate, tucking his hat under his arm, and half bowing.

"Cut out the formality, Don Porfirio," said the governor breezily, "and try that chair—no, that one by the window. Here's a box of cigars—and here's a milder brand."

In slang the governor kept abreast of the times. If in other things he backslid a little he did not lose votes thereby. So the account left a comfortable balance in his favor.

"Shoot!" repeated the governor, and so

saying, he balanced his stubby feet on the edge of his desk and smiled again beneficently upon his visitor.

"I have called," went on Señor Onate, "to find out how the election promises, and to learn what I may do."

He was never quite sure of his English, and the result was that he always spoke it with a painful grammatical correctness.

"Everything!" exploded the governor, "You can do everything, Onate. I came into office by the flicker of an eyelash, and I'm liable to go out again by a lot bigger margin. Some of the boys don't like my policies. They claim that I'm too partial to the Mexicans."

Here he winked broadly, the whole side of his face wrinkling with his mirth.

"And of course that's nonsense, Onate!"

"Ah," murmured Señor Onate, "naturally it is nonsense. You will smile, sir, to know that in my district the Mexicans think you hold a prejudice against them."

The governor still smiled, but in a sickly fashion.

"But you, Onate, will round them out of such foolishness?"

"I?" said Onate, and he waved his pudgy arms. "I do what I can, but when ten thousand tongues start wagging I cannot stop them all—not without great trouble."

The governor knew the symptoms. He waited for the request which he knew was coming, and guessed at its size by the length of the prelude—and infallible token. The picture of the big house with the white veranda grew dim in his mind's eye.

"However," went on Onate smoothly, "I do what I can. I talk here; I talk there. But at my heart, ah, señor, my heart is troubled with doubts."

"The hell it is!" exploded the governor, rolling half out of his chair.

But he gripped the arms of it and controlled himself with a mighty effort.

"I'm sorry to hear it, Onate. Let's have the reason."

As for Señor Onate, he was rolling every second of the situation under his tongue, like a seasoned gourmand.

"I wrote not many days ago asking the governor for a thing—for so little a thing—it was merely to scratch with a pen on paper

—so! But there came back a note of few words that said: 'I will not do it.' I was much grieved. I am still troubled."

"I refused you?" queried the governor, in real astonishment. "What was it about? The matter's out of my mind."

"It was the matter of a man's life," said Onate.

Owing to the natural color of his skin he could not turn red, but he did achieve a gruesome purple. His next words snapped out with a little harsh purr after each one. It was like the warning of the rattler before it strikes.

"The Señor Van Dyck—the swine—the pig—the dog who murdered my brother—my brother Vicente!"

The violence of his emotions set him wheezing, and he felt back in his chair with heaving chest and closed eyes. In the moment during which he could see without being seen the face of the governor hardened into sardonic contempt. He smoothed it to a look of serious concern when one of Onate's small eyes squinted open again.

"About that matter," he said, "I remember now. But your enemies advised you to send the letter to me. It would have been to your harm if I had done what you asked."

"To my harm? To mine?" cried Onate, so surprised that he forgot both anger and grief.

"Exactly," explained the governor, "When I got your letter asking that Van Dyck be outlawed by proclamation I looked into the thing. This is what I found: Van Dyck is a big, husky fellow who has run about getting into mischief all his life. But there's nothing venomous about him, and though he's killed several men he's always acted in self-defense. I can't have a man like that outlawed, Onate."

"And my brother," said Onate, with ominous quiet, "is he not to be avenged?"

The heat which had been accumulating for some time in the governor broke out in a noisy surge.

"Your brother," he said fiercely, "got two hired murderers and attacked Dix Van Dyck from behind. Van Dyck tore a shelf down from the wall of the saloon, brained two of the men, and strangled your brother

Vicente. It was a fine thing for a man with bare hands to do. And by God, he's not going to be touched for it! That's final!"

"The sheriff, for a time, sat speechless. It was, perhaps, better for him that he could not utter a syllable, for during the interim the governor had a chance to quiet down, and very brightly there rose again in his mind the picture of the broad house, the white veranda, the stretch of green lawn, the pleasant vista down the hall and from room to room.

For four years, in his dreams, he had wandered through the apartments of that mansion. And now he was destroying the thing he loved. He was throwing away, perhaps ten thousand votes; he was signing his abdication. And for whom? For a wild daredevil somewhere in the south country; a ne'er-do-well; a good-for-nothing mischief-maker. The sweat stood out upon the forehead of the governor.

"So!" breathed Señor Onate at last, and heaved himself slowly from his chair.

And his basilisk eyes glittered against the face of the other. Between fat thumb and fat forefinger he reduced his cigar to a shapeless pulp; he dropped it on the floor; he ground it under his heel and into the fine, soft carpet. All the time his silent eyes were saying that such were the things he would relish doing to the chief executive.

"So!" he said for the third time, tucked his hat under his arm (as he had seen a fine gentleman do once in a picture of olden days) and turned toward the door.

"Wait!" said the governor weakly.

But Señor Onate proceeded toward the door, though with a shortened step.

"Wait!" called the governor, and enlivened by his alarm he sprang after the Mexican and seized him by the arm. "What the devil, Onate; you're not leaving me like this?"

"I have stayed long enough," said Onate, his voice still broken with panting, "to learn that what I have heard is true. You care for nothing—nothing but the Gringos. Mexican gentlemen may be shot down in cold blood by white dogs who drink their blood. You do not lift your hand. You do not care. Pah! I have stayed long enough; too long!"

He turned once more toward the door, but this time the governor seized him by both shoulders and whirled him around.

"Come back here, Onate! Listen to reason, man!"

Onate waved both his short arms, and in so doing brushed off the grip of the governor.

"And this," he moaned, "is my reward! I, who have slaved for you! I who have brought you votes by the thousand and the ten thousand. I who have held you in my heart for a friend."

Grief, self-pity, raised real tears to his eyes. The governor was much moved. He pushed his visitor into a chair—so hard that he landed with a thump that cut short what promised to be a sob.

"Onate," he said, "rather than break off our friendship, I will do what you wish, I will have the proclamation prepared."

Onate sprang up and seized both hands of the other.

"My benefactor!" he cried, and could only repeat with monotonous joy: "My benefactor!"

"After all," muttered the governor, "it is only one man—only one life—and the fellow has been wild—too wild; I must put a stop to such things; this is no longer the wild West, and it's time my people should know it!"

He paced back and forth across the carpet, his hands clasped behind him; his voice rose; he might have been rehearsing a campaign speech.

He repeated: "This is no longer the wild West!"

It was a good phrase. He smiled contentedly over it. It almost rubbed out the memory of the proclamation to be prepared and signed.

"And the price?" said Onate, taking advantage of the smile.

"What price?" growled the governor.

Onate bowed low.

"The price on the head of the renegade," his voice trembled with suppressed joy, "The price of blood which will draw out the pursuers—what price?"

"A price?" murmured the governor, and his rosy cheeks blanched a little. "A price on the head of this man?"

"In Double Bend," said Onate rapidly, "he resisted arrest. He shot down a deputy marshal."

"Killed?"

"Nearly. In his heart he wished to kill him."

"White?"

"Mexican," said Onate, and showed his teeth.

"H-m-m!" grumbled the governor.

He smashed his right fist into the palm of his left hand, rousing his own anger.

"A common man-killer, by God!" he cried.

"It is true!" echoed Onate.

"It's only just there should be a price on his head—it's—it's justice!"

He had to swallow before he could finish the sentence.

"How much?" begged Onate.

"Five hundred dollars," said the governor, and repeated in a lower voice: "Five hundred dollars for a man's life."

"Five hundred?" echoed Onate, shrilly, "A good horse costs more. A thousand my friend, my dear friend, a thousand dollars. I shall talk for you in the campaign until my voice is hoarse—till it is gone!"

"A thousand dollars," said the governor.

And he turned his back and stared through the window. He felt as if he had taken upon his own shoulders the awful duties of Death, the Reaper.

Onate took his cue.

He backed through the door, calling: "In the morning, my friend, I shall come again. You shall command me in all things. Adios!"

"After all," said the governor, "there has to be law and order."

And in front of him rose again the delightful mirage of the palm trees, and behind them the broad, white veranda, a place of rest.

CHAPTER X.

THE SPECIALIST IN PAIN.

LET us consider for a time the case of the Señor Onate, and now a double blessing had descended upon him. In the first place he was sheriff of Chaparna County, a rich

office, for the county was near the border and a sheriff who would close one eye was heavily paid for that kindness.

But there is one thing dearer to the heart of the Mexican than personal success, and that is the ruin of his enemy. He will sacrifice a thousand dollars if he can take five hundred from his foe; he will go hungry two days and nights if he can deprive his enemy of a single meal.

Think, then, of the joy of the good Onate when he saw, without personal sacrifice, the destruction of Dix Van Dyck accomplished.

It was not because of the death of Vicente alone that he hated Dix Van Dyck. It was rather because of that day when the big man damned Onate thoroughly and conscientiously in the hearing of many people—damned him for a political blood-sucker, a species of cowardly vermin.

The memory of Señor Onate was painfully clear. He could even recall the faces of those who had stood nearby—the white men with open grins of delight, and the Mexicans with a silent enjoyment which was no less profound.

Señor Onate hated them all—all who had witnessed that scene of humiliation. And he remembered with a bitter coldness of heart how he had yearned with all his soul and striven mightily to draw his revolver and plant a forty-five caliber bullet in the midst of the teeth of Van Dyck.

All of this Señor Onate remembered. He remembered, also, how the hand which twitched uneasily toward his hip had been frozen under the calm, all-seeing eye of Van Dyck. There was still room in Onate's heart for gratitude to the Deity that he had *not* touched his gun in sight of the man-killer.

After all, it was better this way. Even supposing that he succeeded with the gun-play, Dix Van Dyck would have fallen forward on his face, dead before he touched the ground. A stupid act of revenge. Death robbed the victor of his triumph. Where was the pain of an instant oblivion?

No, Señor Onate saw far beyond such a petty revenge. The blood of Indian ancestors flowed through his veins. In Mexico, that is the blood of command.

Juarez was pure Indian; Diaz was seven-eighths Indian. And in Onate there lived the instinct which made his ancestors take prisoners in order to sacrifice them at the altar of a heathen god, or torture them to a lingering, hideous death for his own pleasure.

It was for this reason that he sought the outlawry of Dix Van Dyck. Men have lived long years as outlaws in the Southwest, but in the end they are sure to fall. They may leave their haunts and flee far away to escape the heavy hand of the law, but in the end an instinct as inevitable as the homing sense of the carrier-pigeon makes them circle back, and they are caught.

Moreover, from the date on which their outlawry begins they are followed by the consciousness that their capture is predestined. They sever themselves from friends, for the best of friends may betray them for the price. Every stir of dead leaves may be the approaching footfalls of the captors. Every shadowy night may be the screen by which the trailers will stalk up to their prey. The mouth of every cave is like the yawning throat of a cannon; the head-hunters may lurk there. Every day is a lingering death.

All of this Señor Onate knew perfectly. It was for this reason that he rubbed his fat hands together as he left the office of the governor; his heart was at peace with the world.

Still, he was not utterly content. No sooner did he know that a price would be laid on the head of Dix Van Dyck than he was beset with a mighty fear lest some one else might collect that thousand dollars.

Not that he cared deeply for the money itself. There was little of the Jew in Onate. He loved money for the power it gave him rather than for the coin itself. In this case, however, the money meant more than gold. It would be a symbol of his victory; a memory of the crushing of Dix Van Dyck. Moreover, and above all, Dix Van Dyck must know, when he fell, what hand brought him down.

Half the sweetness of revenge would be lost if some other hand accomplished it. He himself would net the outlaw. He him-

self would take the thousand dollars. He would cash the reward in fifty twenty-dollar gold-pieces. Five neat piles that would make. Five handfuls.

In the evening when he sat on his veranda drinking tequila and nibbling the slices of lemon, he would carry the gold in his pocket. He would count it with one hand, letting the heavy coins fall together in chiming showers. And he would call out his son, Rodriguez, a tall and handsome youth, and tell him how a gringo dared to insult an Onate within the hearing of many men, and how that Onate took revenge, carefully, without danger to himself, which made the revenge trebly sweet.

And at last he would take the gold from his pocket and pour it from one hand to the other for the admiration of his son.

At the thought of these things the mouth of Señor Onate moistened, and his eyes filled with tears of delight—for his was a simple soul which could be filled to overflowing by little things, the burning of an enemy's house or the death of a gringo.

It was one thing to determine that Dix Van Dyck should fall by his direct power. It was quite another to accomplish this feat. He might, of course, hire a posse of noted gunmen to take the trail of the outlaw from Double Bend, where he had been last seen. But the noted gunmen were mostly white, and they would have little enthusiasm for trailing one of their kind.

There was another alternative. It came to Señor that night while he sat on his veranda sipping his tequila and letting the white-hot poison trickle, drop by drop, down his grateful throat.

His house sat on the outskirts of Guadalupe, and while the sheriff sat there on the veranda he saw a tall figure of a man swing up the slope of the nearest hill, pause beside a great Spanish dagger, and then plunge into the gloom on the further side.

He knew by the gait of the runner, even at that distance, that it was El Tigre. At that the inspiration came to him. He stamped violently on the floor of the veranda. Instantly a house-servant stood respectfully behind his chair.

"Bring one of the Indians to me," commanded Onate, "and quickly."

The house-servant disappeared as silently as he had come, and within a short time a second figure trotted up outside the veranda, jerked off his sombrero, and stood in an attitude something like that of a soldier at attention. A tall, somber figure, the sun struck him in profile and painted in black the cavernous hollows of the cheeks and the deep-sunken eyes. A hungry leanness; in that half light the eyes were like cavities of darkness touched with sparks of fire.

"Alvarado," said Onate, his voice losing most of that terseness with which he had addressed the house-servant, and taking on a tone of mingled awe and fear, "find me El Tigre. I saw him run over the top of that hill."

The Indian, in place of answering, replaced the sombrero on his head, whirled, and swept up the slope of the hill with the long stride of the tireless runner. Onate remained still and straight in his chair until Alvarado dipped out of sight over the crest of the hill. Then he slumped back in his chair.

Now the households of rich Mexicans are always numerous, but there needs some explanation for the fact that Onate's establishment included Yaqui Indians. The Yaqui is to the Mexican what in the Middle Ages the Gentile was to the Jew. A Yaqui will walk many hungry miles to get one shot at a Mexican; and a Mexican will walk as many miles to avoid a Yaqui.

The railroads in the Southwest have employed Yaquis and Mexican peons at the same time, but always the Yaqui has to be lodged and fed apart from the peon. And in the eating-hall a peon would rather storm the gates of hell than take a seat he knows is reserved for a Yaqui.

The conflict between Yaqui and Mexican is not new. It is warmed and cherished by four centuries of hatred and murder. It goes back to the time when grim Cortez conquered most of the tribes, but did not conquer them all. Neither did his successors succeed.

For four hundred years the war has continued. Both sides have used rope and fire and bullet and knife. Still the issue has not been decided. The mutual hatred has become an instinct; it is almost a re-

ligion. As the Algonkians, and Mohicans, and Hurons once feared the Iroquois, so the Mexicans fear the Yaquis. Give a Yaqui a knife and he will trail two Mexicans armed with guns, and probably he will come back with his knife-blade reddened by something besides rust.

He is made by nature to be the conqueror of the Southwest. He will put salt and tobacco in his pouch, sling a short-barreled rifle over his shoulder, and strike into the burning heart of the desert at a dog-trot, which he maintains from morning to night, stopping only long enough to kill and eat raw meat.

What that meat is he does not care. He will devour a prairie rat; he has been known to tear the flesh of a coyote, newly slain and warm. A fire is a luxury to him, and cooked meat a delicacy, not a necessity. Running at his shambling trot, he will cover in ten days more miles than any other man in the world will cover on the finest of horses. In twenty-four hours he will cover a hundred and twenty miles the first day, and on the following days he will travel nearly as far.

Moreover, he knows the desert not because he has to know it, but because he loves it. He can follow a trail almost through the night, and some astonished travelers have sworn that he is gifted with an animal power of scenting.

He fights because he loves fighting, and when a Mexican is in sight he is filled with what amounts to a religious joy. With a rifle, to be sure, he is never perfectly at home. For that matter, no people in the world, outside of the whites, have ever quite understood the use of powder and lead.

Nevertheless, he achieves a tolerable accuracy with the gun, though he is nearly useless with a revolver. On the other hand, he is a genius with any sort of cold steel, and at a short distance he throws his camp-hatchet or whips across his knife with as much accuracy and almost as deadly an effect as the six-gun of a border ruffian.

Taking all these things into consideration, it must be clear that a Mexican would rather take a rattlesnake into his household than have aught to do with a Yaqui. It is doubly strange, therefore, that Señor

Don Porfirio Maria Onate should keep six of these deadly fellows about him day and night. But the reason is perfectly clear.

CHAPTER XI.

EL TIGRE.

THE only retrospective quality which the Indian possesses is a singularly acute memory for personal benefits and personal wrongs. One who harms him had better have trodden on the tail of a rattler. One who confers a favor upon him is installed at once in the innermost recesses of the Yaqui's heart.

His vindictiveness lives as long as his life. Four hundred years ago a Spaniard named Cortez committed certain horrible outrages under the name of exploring the New World. Because of that the Yaqui has hated forever all Spaniards, and all who are tainted with Spanish blood.

But the Yaqui's memory of benefactions is almost as enduring. Give him a crust of bread when he is hungry and he will follow you to your home and lie across your threshold like a dog—a deadly guardian against all intruders. The life of your son and the honor of your daughter are safer in his hands than they would be in your own. In fact, so bitter has been the life of the Yaqui, so full of hatred and battling, that when he meets kindness it takes a divine savor in his heart. His benefactor becomes his god.

It chanced that some years before Señor Onate crossed the border to claim a debt from a general high in the service. It was not a large debt, and Onate went more to irritate the general than with the hope of collecting it. As he knew beforehand, the general did not have a tithe of the sum; even if he had had it he would not have paid Onate, who lived among the Americans so far to the forgetful North.

But he showed Onate, in lieu of payment, a most enjoyable time. Rather late in the evening, much heated with a wild mixture of Mexican drinks, from mescal to beer, they visited the prison, and paused particularly in front of the cell where six Yaquis lay imprisoned, awaiting the rope

of the hangman. They were condemned for a murder. The evidence against them consisted in the fact that they had been found in the vicinity of a murdered Mexican. This was quite sufficient.

Señor Onate regarded them with a mixture of terror and delight, as a child gazes on the harmless strength of the lion behind the bars at the zoo. A drunken desire seized him to possess these dangerous fighters, even as the child longs to have the lion's cub for a pet. Particularly he observed the lean face and meaningless eyes of El Tigre, a noted Indian. Memories of his exploits rang in the ears of Onate. It was then that he remembered the debt of the general.

So he proposed on the spot that if the Yaquis were given him he would discharge the debt. The general agreed. He had no direct authority over the prisoners; but indirect authority is all one needs south of the Rio Grande. A well-dressed man can order an arrest. A cavalier with a silver-mounted saddle can break up a mob.

So the general saw the mayor and the mayor saw some one else, and the next morning six Yaquis were escorted to a distant part of the border. Here they were informed that they owed their liberty to the ministrations of one Señor Onate, in the County of Chaparna, far to the north, and that he desired their presence at his house.

This, as they very well understood, was all that was necessary. Thirty-six hours later a house-servant, palsied with terror, ran to Onate with the news that six Yaquis stood on his veranda.

Something of the servant's terror was communicated to the master, but he understood something of what they must be. So he armed himself with a hollow dignity and went down to receive his wild guests. They were El Tigre and his five grim followers.

Now Señor Onate, despite many faults, understood men—even Indians. Instead of making a long speech to the Yaquis and enlarging upon what he done for them, or demanding an oath of faithfulness from them, he ordered that food be brought to them, and pointed to an outhouse where they might sleep.

From that moment they were his slaves. At first they took it for granted that the Mexican wanted them for some special service, but as soon as they understood that there was no particular mission for them to perform they settled down calmly to the domestic life before them.

The five followers had no families, having lost wife and child by the bullets and bayonets of Mexican soldiery. But El Tigre had a daughter, secreted among the hills. He begged permission to be absent a week, and on the appointed day he returned, leading a tall girl, beautiful for her kind. She cooked for the six Indians, and they labored in the gardens of Onate.

The scheme was perfect, except that now and then, toward the close of the day, a deep restlessness came over the Yaquis, and sometimes they would depart in a body, or one at a time, and spend the hours till morning prowling across the hills behind Guadalupe, like so many hungry wolves eager for a trail of blood. It was on such an errand, as Onate well knew, that El Tigre himself had departed this evening, and he doubted whether or not Alvarado would ever overtake his leader.

However, El Tigre must have run at less than half his ordinary speed; in an hour he returned and stood, as Alvarado had stood before him, hat in hand, stiff and straight, outside the veranda and directly before Onate. The *señor* started when he glanced up and saw the apparition. By this time it was completely dark, and he was aware first of the steady, bright eyes of El Tigre, visible almost as if they possessed the phosphorescence of his namesake; afterward he made out the gaunt outlines of the Indian chief. El Tigre took the prolonged silence as a command to speak. "My father," he said, "has sent for El Tigre, his son."

"Your father," responded Onate, with an equal solemnity, "is sick at the heart with many troubles."

He waited, but it was not the habit of El Tigre to make idle comments.

"There is a man," said Onate with sudden vehemence, "whom I hate and who hates me."

He paused again, rather regretting his outburst. But the purring voice of El

Tigre, a harsh guttural, thick, with a hesitancy between words, like one who seldom speaks, answered: "The enemies of the father are the enemies of the son. El Tigre is lean with hunger. It is long since he hunted. His ribs stick out through his skin because of his hunger; his tongue is dry because he wishes to kill."

Onate shivered a little and hastily swallowed the rest of the contents of the glass before him. The warmth was grateful to him. Suddenly he had an overbright vision of the six figures stealing through some not-far-distant night upon a trail visible to their eyes alone. He saw them slip through the blackness toward the red eye of a camp-fire.

He saw the bulk of Dix Van Dyck, herculean among the shadows thrown by the fire. He saw one of those stealthy prowlers of the midnight creep behind, crouch; saw the spring, the flash of the knife driven home; the leap and outflung arms of the white man; his fall, face down, among the red embers of the fire. Onate shivered again, but he grinned as he leaned toward El Tigre.

"The man is Dix Van Dyck, big man on a great horse. A great warrior. El Tigre will win much honor by that killing, and he will take a mighty load from the heart of his father. Moreover, there is a price on the head of the man, and El Tigre may hunt him as freely as he would hunt a coyote, with traps or with guns. He was last seen at Double Bend."

"The heart of his father is the heart of El Tigre," responded the Indian, and without further speech he vanished.

CHAPTER XII.

DOLORS.

THE Anglo-Saxon, when his heart is full, seeks action; the Mexican, when his heart is full, seeks words; the Indian, when his heart is full, seeks silence. So it happened that the next morning Señor Onate, on his inevitable veranda, was ill at ease. He was happy, to be sure; and wore an automatic smile, but his thoughts were running to the north on the heels of El Tigre and his five companion bloodhounds.

These things being known, it is not difficult to imagine why Señor Onate watched with interest the tall form of Dolores, daughter of El Tigre.

She came from the squat door of the dobe hut, where the Yaquis dwelt and moved onto a little hillock near by. There she took her stand and screened her eyes against the glare of the sun while she looked north into the shadows of the hills. The wind fluttered the loose end of her crimson rebozo, and blew the dress about her, clinging at every curve.

She was very tall, very slender, very erect, and as she came down the hill again toward the hut, walking with the easy, swinging grace of a youth, Señor Onate felt a very great need of words. His heart, indeed, was filled to overflowing, for the gringos should know, before many days, what comes to those who cross the path of Señor Don Porfirio Maria Onate.

He called: "Dolores!"

She swerved in the midst of a stride and stood stiff and straight, looking toward him, as if she could not understand that he had called. He had never summoned her before, but now she was the only creature in the world who could entirely understand and sympathize with him. Her father had taken the war-path, and he had taken it at the command of the sheriff. Señor Onate felt a sudden kinship with the girl; he forgot, for the instant, that she was an Indian, and a Yaqui at that. So he called again: "Dolores, come hither!"

She came with the same buoyantly graceful stride, like a young man, and her small feet paused beyond the veranda at a respectful distance. She stood much as her father stood in the presence of the great sheriff. In place of removing a hat, which she did not wear, she took off the rebozo which partially veiled her face.

It was the ultimate tribute of respect; it was like the act of a child which will hide nothing from the eye of its father. The heart of Señor Onate was touched.

It was his habit to carry about with him pockets full of trinkets. For a little gift here and there, given with a good grace, is more to the childish heart of the Mexican than a rich bribe to a white man. He

fumbled now, automatically, in one of his loose coat-pockets, and brought out a slender necklace of coral—a flimsy trinket, but very bright in the morning sun.

He held it high so that the light could catch at it and run flashing from bead to bead. The face of Dolores, daughter of El Tigre, lighted a single instant with desire, and then the light went out. Her eyes had grown luminous and darkened again like the flashing of a red torch over a black pool—a glimmer, and then a more profound darkness.

"They are yours, Dolores," said the sheriff, "to comfort you for the loss of your father. He will come again in a little while. And in the meantime you shall have these."

He flung them idly to her. Her hand darted out as swiftly as the head of a striking snake. The beads were caught to her and disappeared in the folds of her dress. Once again there was that flash of light in her eyes. It reminded Señor Onate of the spark that flies from flint when iron strikes it. She straightened a little more, and her head went back. She was about to speak of her gratitude, and on such occasions an Indian never does less than orate.

"My father," said Dolores, and Onate wondered at the timbre of her voice, deep as a man's and light as a girl's, "my father is filled with care for his children. I, Dolores, am not worthy. I am less than the desert rat creeping from mesquite to mesquite under the eye of the eagle which cricles high in the air—high—a little speck on a white sky."

She made a slow gesture, first raising her arm and then unfolding her slender hand. It suggested infinite height.

"Yet the care of the father is even for Dolores. He has made her rich. The heart of El Tigre shall beat hard when he sees the gift of the Señor Onate. I am the child of my father; I am his slave. I am his shadow which does what he wills; which comes when he comes; which goes when he goes."

She drew the rebozo over her head again, turned, and made back toward the dobe hut. Señor Onate watched her, swelling with the importance which comes from the knowledge of a good deed done. It made a little warmth in his body and a lightness

in his brain. But perhaps that came from following the easy, springing gait of Dolores. Like Diomedes, she rose a little with every step, as if her small feet scorned the ground. He matched her pride of gait against the humility of her speech, and chuckled softly.

Afterward he followed stealthily toward the dobe hut until he gained an advantage post at the rear window. Through this he peered and saw Dolores squatted cross-legged on the floor of the hut. In the full current of the sunlight which slanted through the door, she dangled the string of bright beads, and as the light made liquid brilliance of each bead the face of the girl shone with an almost fierce exultation.

With a soft little cry of delight she tossed the beads above her and caught them again with a dexterous hand as they fell. She poured them from hand to hand, swiftly, so that it seemed at times as if she were handling liquid fire. She slipped them over her head and, catching up a polished steel mirror, surveyed herself from every angle.

Back to his comfortable chair on the veranda the Señor Onate carried the image of that smile. He forgot, in time, the head-hunt which El Tigre was carrying on in the northern hills. He forgot, even, the inevitable tequila which stood in a vase on the little table beside him.

Now, it is a dangerous thing to forget too much. It is also dangerous to think too much of one thing, particularly in a climate where the sun burns ideas home in the brain. There is nothing worse than brooding in the tropics or semi-tropics, and when a man becomes too visionary it is time for him to travel north and cool his body with snow and his thoughts with change.

Of this, however, the Señor Onate did not think. He gave himself up to visions like an opium smoker. The skin of Dolores, in fact, was hardly darker than his own. The complexion which he saw in his dreams, however, was almost an Italian olive. In those same dreams her smile grew softer. Her eyes grew gently conscious of him.

Now these dreams were endurable during the day, but when the sun dropped from sight, and when the night wind began to

whisper drowsily through the leaves of the palms. Señor Onate awoke from his reverie and began to think of reality.

This, however, was no easy task. While he ate his supper the vision crossed between him and his plate. It dazzled him. He sat, absent-minded, until the meat grew cold. Then he roused himself long enough to curse the waitress and the cook in a needless fury, although he remembered that a doctor of repute had once warned him against apoplexy.

At this, trembling with alarm, he called for a wet, cold towel, and reclined in a wicker chair with the towel wrapped about his feverish forehead. He began to curse, cautiously, lest he should rouse himself again, the house, the servants, the country, the climate, the Americanos, the Yaquis, and Dolores. Here he paused and began to repeat the name over and over, like a musician lingering on a pleasing chord. He called for more tequila.

Meantime the word Dolores grew more and more fixed in his mind. He discovered that it was necessary for him to see her, speak to her. At first he thought of sending for her. Then he decided that he could not speak to her in the hearing of his eaves-dropping house-servants. Moreover, he wanted the cooler, fresher air.

He went out on the veranda again to think, but the moment he crossed the threshold he was aware of a great yellow moon pushing up above an eastern hill. He watched it with a peculiar fascination. It rolled higher until it seemed to rest, for a moment, like an enormous, illumined blossom, in the crest of a Spanish dagger. And it rose higher, hanging poised directly above the hut of Dolores, daughter of El Tigre. Señor Onate walked toward the hut.

At the door he called her, his voice low and a little tremulous: "Dolores."

She stood a glimmering figure in the dusk. He could not see her face.

"Come out in the night, Dolores," he said; "it is cool; it is pleasant. Besides, you should see the yellow moon."

She stepped out and stood beside him. Still, he could not see her face, for the shadow of the hut struck across it.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



I.

MASTERS returned from Europe, fed up for the time with adventure, which he had pursued in varying guises since he could remember.

In imagination, at the early age of ten he was a pirate bold cruising the seven seas and concealing his plunder upon a famous rock where dwelt a beautiful lady.

There was always a lady in Masters's early dreams—later they all materialized, which was somewhat bewildering to Masters, making it difficult to make a choice of divinities.

When he took officers' training and later sailed for France, it transpired that there was a bevy of fair maidens to wish him safe return!

But to go back to his early dreams. The pirate bold became in the process of evolution a knight of the road, with no will but the wind's will, to drift here and there in the eternal pursuit of adventure.

Then in that chameleonlike way that would be discouraging to any one but a boy, he became, in turn, a policeman, perpetually to assist some fair one from entanglements; an aviator, conductor on a street-car, intermittently a soldier—marching up and down the city streets before the houses at the head of a tatterdemalion army—the girls standing upon the sidewalk, watching wistfully, waiting impatiently for the army to disband.

Even at the early age of ten, Masters had a way with him, which gave *a priori* right to the prettiest girls. If there was a youth intrepid enough to dispute it, Alec was always anxious to settle the matter. He was not always invincible in his fist-cuffs; but whether he won or lost the emoluments always gravitated toward him.

He was the perennial lover, but he had discovered after he began self-analysis that it was love with which he was in love, and no special "ladye faire," which somehow only heightened his attractiveness to the other sex since he always confessed and they always forgave, and always remembered, not with any regrets, be it known!

He was not as handsome as a Greek god, far from it. But he was a fine, up-standing, virile figure of a man, in which the good red blood of several nations mingled; his hair was thick, straight, turbulent, tow; his eyes blue as the gentian flower, his complexion fair and ruddy, until the soldier tan covered him thickly to about the shade of his officer's uniform.

He made a splendid leader of men, and he returned with honors and medals and a weariness and distaste for further adventure, which it took three weeks of the soft winds of the Pacific to fan like chaff out of his brain cells.

He had hardly landed in New York, and had barely had time to kiss all the girls with whom he was in love, before his father, a large dealer in motor-cars,

equipped him with a commission to investigate the trade conditions for cars in the Far East and a ticket for Vladivostok, where was stationed the headquarters of the American Army in Siberia.

Before the war this would have been adventure, greedily accepted; but Alec was fed up, as the English put it, with adventuring. There was a strange look in his eyes that was quite foreign to them. He would stand staring for hours from the club window, seeing not the street scenes before him at all.

Arthur Winchester, a young officer who had been with him in France, was also to go to the Far East. Winchester was to establish a market for a line of American canned products.

Alec came to himself after delightful sun-soused days of desultory conversation, of sleeping in the sun and soft wind of the Pacific in his deck chair.

It was good to have seen only water for days; nothing but sparkling, placid water. It was good to have slept and not to have dreamed horribly—to be soothed by the monotonous chug-chug of the engine and the swish of the waves against the prow and sides of the merchant vessel *Grantland*, laden with passengers and produce from the United States.

This morning, as he stood at the railing, he was the eager adventurer again, clothed very conventionally in blue serge, a Panama shading his eyes, the inevitable cigarette burning to ash as he forgot to smoke, and gazed eagerly out over what proved to be the scene of his greatest adventure, filled with the intrigue and subtlety of the Far East.

Vladivostok, built on the slope of half a dozen hills—the heights grimly fortified even though the peace congress was still parleying in Paris, lay on the curve of the Golden Horn Bay. Mosques shone white in the morning sun, peaking up with their strange Russian architecture back of the warehouses and wharfs of the water-front.

"The world has shrunk," Masters remarked casually to Winchester, who stood beside him. "Siberia now is our next-door neighbor, and it used to be only a state of mind for Russian novelists."

Arthur flicked his cigarette ash over the railing into the bay. A Chinaman pattered past them, looking toward the city.

"And now it is a place where bad Chinamen go before they die," laughed Winchester, as he watched the vanishing back of the Celestial. "Some one on the ship, I have forgotten who, told me that the Chinamen just about have things their own way there in Vladivostok. They are so damned industrious that the Russian *mujik* soon learns to leave all his work for the chink to do."

"For ways that are dark and tricks that are vain the heathen chinee is peculiar," quoted Alec.

"When I was in Columbia we used to go down into Chinatown slumming," pursued Arthur. "But unless you knew the ropes you never *saw* anything, not a pipe or a dice. Apparently, everything was as open and aboveboard as possible. But Bob Lang's father—he was police commissioner, you remember, for a number of years—cleaned out their hidden dives and sent a lot of them out of the country."

Masters nodded. "I remember; it was about three years ago. By the way, wasn't there a terrible tragedy in the family, about that time? It knocked out Bob badly."

"You mean the drowning in the Hudson? Yes, it almost wrecked the old commissioner, warrior though he was, and it killed his wife."

In the bustle of docking the Chinese question and the Lang tragedy were both forgotten. But in the droshky being driven along the Svetlanskaya which followed the curve of the Golden Horn, the question of the yellow man, even in the midst of a multiplicity of strange, new impressions, was vividly revived.

The yellow peril was everywhere. Riding in automobiles, behind the counters of shops and bazaars, hopping along the streets, his hands folded in his ridiculous shirt, his long cue flopping, his round hat set well down over piercing, heavy-lidded, oblique eyes, he was omnipresent.

"Look, Arthur, there are two American girls!" cried Alec, excitedly grasping his companion's arm. "I thought we were going into exile!"

"Instead of which, you have found a new Eden?" quizzed Arthur.

"No other Eve can compare with the American, so far as I have been able to discover," contributed Masters, unabashed.

"Not even the French, or the Italian or the English?" laughed Winchester.

Masters shook his head and smiled his wide, engaging, ingratiating smile. In that very moment of vigorous denial, he was caught in the romantic spell of the Far East.

A pair of the most wonderful brown eyes that he had ever seen, with long, fringing eyelashes and arched brows, were gazing into his over a yashmak from between the curtains of a sedan chair. Velvety soft, smudged in with purple shadows, they met his and clung, and Masters lived through an astonishing cycle of emotions, for he was sure he read appeal in their depths.

He smiled. The eyes smiled back. He caught a vague outline of an oval face through the misty veil as the curtains of the sedan chair swung back into place and two coolies clothed in pure white started away at a dog-trot with the chair.

Their droshky had been halted by traffic congestion. Droshkies, jinrikishas, motor-cars, sedan chairs, were all jumbled together here in the heart of Vladivostok, the East and the West come together.

Masters felt a quickening of his pulses as the droshky rolled on. There was something about those eyes that disturbed him—it was the look of appeal which he had fancied he descried in their depths. He was conscious of an overmastering desire to see them again! Also of a surprisingly tender, despairingly painful feeling that tugged sharply at his heart.

What was the matter with him, he asked himself sharply? Was he idiot enough to fall in love with a little unknown shimmery-veiled oriental woman of some dark-skinned race, borne about the streets of Vladivostok in a sedan chair? He was sure only that she was not Chinese, for her eyes were brown and set straight.

If he were falling in love, he told himself, at least it was only with a chimera, a wraith of his own imaginings; as unattain-

able as the stars or the misty substance of dreams—suggested to him by those beautiful eyes.

It spoke pretty well for his imagination, he decided, when he could start a romance with only a pair of eyes as a foundation!

The droshky paused in front of the Hotel Moscow, across from Government House, where they were to live while in Vladivostok. It was a surprisingly modern hotel—as indeed, was everything about Vladivostok—electric lights, telephones, elevators, and bell hops!

During the ensuing days Alec and Arthur were busy to the point of distraction. Alec found an office next door to a Chinese restaurant, and possibly it was the sound of the weird Chinese music—the clashing of cymbals, the beating of drums, the squeaking of wind instruments that kept a pair of brown eyes so persistently in his mind. Sleeping or waking, they haunted him.

Also during those days, while he was faring about the streets, he kept a sharp watch out for that particular sedan chair which had sheltered the owner of the eyes. But he did not see it again. The town was crowded—a standing population of a hundred and fifty thousand besides the floating visitors—the American soldiers stationed there—hundreds of refugees from various parts of southwestern Siberia.

So it became a tantalizing quest! Perhaps she had returned to China, or wherever she belonged.

Arthur invaded the room one night with an invitation.

"I've met those stunning girls that you thought were American, Alec. They are English, and their father is a wholesale grocer. We are asked out to their house—it's in a charming suburb—I've already been out there to luncheon. Let's run out to-night. They said any evening."

Alec was climbing into his evening clothes.

"Sorry, old top," Masters replied. "I've another engagement. Run along and cultivate your English accent. I'll be glad to go another evening."

He did not explain that his only engagement for this particular evening, or for any other evening, was with a wraith, a dream

woman built up around a vivid pair of eyes and making flesh and blood women seem rather tame in comparison.

Somehow, while he had a great admiration for fresh pink and white English girls, he was more intrigued just now with an oriental woman! It was the mystery that was getting Masters. He was caught fast in the lure of the subtle East.

He was going this evening, alone, to the Chinese restaurant the hectic music of which kept dinging in his ears. Perhaps the brown eyes might be there!

Masters found it very little like the hybrid Chinese restaurants that happened every few minutes on dear old Broadway.

In an alcove made entirely of carved teakwood, sat the gorgeously coated Chinese musicians. Lanterns lighted the room with a subdued varihued glow. Ornamental bamboo partitioned it into small alcoves, where diners sat around pearl-inlaid tables.

Incense burning here and there in wrought iron jars mingled with the cigarette smoke made the place rather stifling, though the air was artificially cooled. As Masters followed the soft-footed waiter, he was surprised by hearing a voice calling to him in French. He was not wholly sure that he was pleased.

Ivan Ivanovitcha, young Russian official, was sitting at one of the tables with several of his countrymen. Ivan appeared to have no prejudices against fraternizing with an American. Alec had met him in the course of business.

"Join us, won't you?" he queried after presenting the other men. "I see that you are alone."

"Charmed!" acquiesced Alec. He accepted a cigarette from the gold case of a young bewhiskered Russian who looked like a Red, but was perfectly harmless and very well mannered.

"You have come to see the famous Chinook Winds?" hazarded Ivan pleasantly as they reseated themselves at the round table.

"What are they?" queried Alec in his faultless French.

"Not 'they,' her!" corrected Ivan. "There is only one!"

"Oh, a woman! What does the name mean?"

The Russian shrugged his broad shoulders.

"What does any name mean?" he queried pertinently. "However, the girl was named by some poetical wanderer from your own Alaska. It appears that the winds that blow across the ocean from the Flowery Kingdom carry with them through the early spring and summer the fragrance of the flowers of that most delightful land. The girl is sweet and lovely and dances as lightly as the winds—hence the name. Her feet have never been bound, which is strange. She is the daughter of old Wun Sing—'tis said that her mother was white—he always sits there in his corner and watches her like a fat old spider. He owns the restaurant and his ten sons play in the orchestra. The girl often dances the European dances, and is always veiled. No one ever sees her face, only her glorious eyes.

Masters's pulses leaped. Perhaps his quest was ended! In the lovely young dancer, the daughter of old Wun Sing, he might find the girl about whom he had thought and dreamed ever since he had come to Vladivostok.

But even if he did, what would it profit him? She was separated from him by training, color, environment; all the differences that bars the East from the West.

At that moment there was a clashing of cymbals, a horrible beating of drums, a wailing of wind instruments; then into the room glided a fairy, a sprite. She was clothed in a dancing costume of bespangled chiffon; her rounded arms were bare, only a thin strap of spangles held her bodice over her beautiful shoulders—a costume that was of the West, not of the East—which does not display the feminine charms in quite this way. She wore tiny white satin slippers of European make. Jewels sparkled in bracelets upon her rounded arms, jewels twinkled at her throat.

Lightly as thistle-down she pirouetted around the sunken garden in the center of the room. And as she neared the table where Alec was seated, he saw again, above the veil, the beautiful eyes of the girl of the sedan chair.

She faltered an instant in her dance,

took a little step toward him, almost there seemed appeal in the tiny, outstretched hands—fear in the eyes that sought his. For she recognized him, Alec was convinced.

So slight had been the deviation from her usual manner, however, that the others did not notice.

"Chinook Winds," sighed a young be-whiskered Russian whose name Alec had forgotten. "You will fall in love with her, *monsieur*, but you will sigh out your love to the four winds. She is rarely seen outside this restaurant and then only in a closely guarded sedan chair. You see the Chinese keep their women very secluded. Old Wun Sing sacrifices his principles for money by permitting his daughter to dance in public and expose her charms of person in an extremely uncelestial way—therefore he is sterner with her than is usual even among that race."

They all chattered on in their fluent French, the cymbals clashed and the drums beat, and the wind instruments piped. But while Alec kept up a conversation with the Russians, he had only the vaguest notions of what he or they were talking about. His brain was in a seething maelstrom of conjecture.

Why was there appeal in the little hands? Why the fear in the beautiful eyes of the lovely Chinook Winds?

II.

It was difficult for Alec to attend to business, with romance calling to him from the restaurant next door. He formed the habit of going there each night for dinner—sitting unobtrusively in a corner—not so unobtrusively, however, but that the eyes of old Wun Sing were fixed upon him occasionally with a basilisk stare.

He was usually alone. Arthur, bewildered, perhaps a trifle hurt, that Masters had refused all his invitations, left him to himself. Occasionally Alec joined a group of American officers—the Russians whom he had come to like—but usually he was by himself, and always, on these occasions, there passed between him and the dancer swift glances of recognition—almost, it seemed to Alec, that they had run the gamut of all the tender emotions. That

was why he wished to be alone. He was caught fast in the lure of the intriguing East, the charm of a pair of *beaux yeux* and an exquisitely modeled figure.

A fortnight winged by. His inner life was a colorful thing—lighted by the divine fire, that in this case was destined to become only a consuming holocaust—consuming himself. He was quite mad about a girl who was not of his race, to whom he had never uttered a word save by the universal language that speaks when eyes meet eyes! And he could not bring himself to remain away from the restaurant even for a single night!

He sat in his usual place this evening smoking innumerable cigarettes, hardly touching the excellent dinner he had ordered. The Chinese are good cooks, but Alec was not hungry. Nervously he watched for the advent of the girl.

She always entered, presumably by a door, though it was hidden by two stunted, twisted, hideous bamboo trees. The girl was sinisterly guarded, thought Masters, as he glanced toward the screen and encountered the wicked eyes of old Wun Sing, who always sat there.

Soon the girl floated in. As she passed the table where Masters was sitting, from one little bejeweled hand slipped a tiny handkerchief.

Her eyes traveled from his face to the bit of lace and linen. Masters understood that he was to secure it.

That had better be done after she had finished her dance and he was ready to leave, he concluded, after a moment of subtle thinking.

He dropped his cigarette case and in stooping over to recover it he secured the handkerchief and crushed it in his hand.

A faint maddening perfume was wafted up to his nostrils as he placed it with his case in his pocket.

That this dropping of the handkerchief meant something he had not the slightest doubt. He wondered if possibly there was some oriental significance attached to the rite which he was supposed to discover and to which he was to respond?

He was restless to be gone from the place; it held no further interest for him

now that the girl had danced. Calling the Chinaman who had waited upon him by the simple expedient of clapping his hands, he paid his check and wandered out into the brilliantly lighted street.

He stood irresolutely before the restaurant, extracted a cigarette from his case and lighted it. Never had adventure so called to him, never had his pulses leaped in this maddening fashion in response to the lure.

As he returned the cigarette-case to his pocket, his fingers came in contact with the soft bit of linen and lace that the girl had dropped. The perfume that still clung to his fingers made his senses reel with the acuteness of his longing to hold that perfectly rounded figure in his arms, to penetrate back of the veil that concealed her face. His blood was molten lava that coursed hotly.

As he turned slowly away and walked toward his hotel a feeling of reckless dissatisfaction surged over him. This sort of love-making had its distinct drawbacks, he confessed, as he shook the ash from his cigarette and apologized to a woman whom he had nearly run over.

Masters tramped along blindly, his feet racing now, in response to the urge of his tumultuous impulses. He was quite mad, he told himself grimly, and he had no remote desire to become sane. He felt quite unable to cope with a situation that held him in its octopus grip.

All the clean, fine American fiber of him shrank from becoming entangled in any way with the girl and at the same time all the hot young adventurous spirit of him was for carrying on the affair—because it distinctly *was* an affair, even though the two had never spoken a word to each other.

Somehow he reached his room in the Hotel Moscow, and out of the vortex of his whirling emotions there had been cast up one resolve—to see the thing through!

He took the little handkerchief from his pocket and spread it out upon his knee. Suddenly he bent closely over the thing.

There was printing upon it, done in queer, crabbed, little hieroglyphics. But they were English letters and they spelled this message:

“Help.”

Just one little word, but that word raised in his mind the most horrible conjectures. Was the girl held in duress by that fat, oily, old Chinaman? Was he really her father? If so, why did she wish help? What danger threatened her? Or was it simply a desire to escape from an irksome parental bondage?

Whatever the reason, it was a call to which he must respond, if he were to obey the law of his nature.

It occurred to him, as he slipped a gun into his pocket, that there might be some danger in pitting himself against the intriguing East. He smiled, however, as he glanced again at the bit of linen and lace, and the scent of it rose like sweet incense to his nostrils.

He might be a fool, but he meant to go back to the restaurant and investigate. It was against reason, against his better judgment, against all the brood of cautionary whispers, but he meant to do it.

Suddenly, as he looked at the handkerchief, he was struck with the peculiar rusty brown color of the printing. It was *in* English; for the moment he had forgotten that fact. This proved that the girl knew at least a bit of his own language. This was not surprising, as the young Russian had explained that her mother was white.

But the rusty brown color worried him. Going to his dresser he made ready to try a little experiment.

He secured a scarf-pin with a very sharp point. This he sterilized with the flame of a burning match, then plunged it into one of his fingers.

Into the blood that he squeezed out he dipped another match, and made some marks upon the linen. With something akin to horror Alec saw what the girl's expedient had been! She had written her appeal in her own blood.

Evidently she was deprived of writing material. The Chinese woman usually has no use for these; she neither reads nor writes; her toilet and her babies are her only recreations.

III.

As Alec reentered the restaurant he saw that the place was practically deserted save

by several Chinamen. The orchestra had departed, and some of the lights had been extinguished.

The place was one of the "all-night" variety, however, so Masters had no difficulty in being served. He ordered a bowl of chow main, a bowl of tea, and some cigarettes.

As he sat there smoking cigarettes and permitting the tea and the Chinese dish to cool, he had not the faintest notion of what to do next. He must wait for inspiration.

In a moment it came. One by one the "chinks" rose, pattered across the floor and disappeared behind the ugly screen of gnarled and twisted bamboo, that presumably concealed a door through which the lovely Chinook Winds made her nightly appearance.

Old Wun Sing, who usually sat beside the screen, was not there; in fact, no one was now left but the waiter and Masters. Alec placed some money on the table; the waiter was taking a nap standing up, his hands folded in his sleeves, his head nodding grotesquely.

Masters rose, walked behind the screen and opened the door he found there.

It led into a broad, dimly lighted hallway. Upon the floor was thick silken rugs; in the air was the smoke of burning incense, sending up wavering spirals before a great Buddha that squatted at the farther end of the corridor.

Alec heard the musical clinking of coins, smelled the enervating odor of opium. If there was a slight hint of the Occident in the room without, in conformity with the tastes of a diversified patronage, here was the very essence of the Orient with its subtle suggestions to an imaginative mind. Silken-hung openings upon either side of the hall led into the gambling rooms and the pipe divans.

Masters peeped through the openings of the curtains. Where, in all these various rooms, should he find the girl whom he was seeking; and, after having found her, what then?

Very possibly she was not in the building at all. It might be that when she left the restaurant she went to some other part of the city. Thus he speculated as he walked the length of the hall, peering with

much curiosity through the apertures between the silken hangings.

At last he reached the squatting Buddha. Behind the idol was a door without curtains—rather it was more an ornamental archway which led into another hallway that seemed to be the entrance to a luxurious suite of living rooms.

A bejeweled lamp shed wavering lances of light over another doorway through which Masters stepped into a splendidly proportioned apartment hung with a profusion of richly embroidered curtains, furnished with massively carved teakwood divans and tabourets, holding gorgeous vases, all dimly lighted with fantastic lamps.

Masters glanced around. Perhaps he had penetrated to the holy of holies. He felt suddenly apologetic; a man's home was his castle, which should be sacred from invasion. If a stranger had made so bold as to enter his father's dwelling without invitation, Alec was sure that he would have been tempted to kick so impertinent a person into the street.

But he had the handkerchief with the word "help" printed upon it in English. There had been fear and appeal in the beautiful eyes of the girl who had taken this way of making it known that she needed assistance of some sort. These excuses he thought justified him in an otherwise unwarranted intrusion.

And now from the silken cushions of one of the great divans materialized a woman, clothed in full Chinese costume, her hair dressed in the Oriental fashion. Her veil had been discarded.

For an instant Masters failed to recognize her, but he could hardly mistake her eyes, red and swollen though they were with weeping; the eyes that he had first seen peeping at him over a yashmak.

But what caused his brain to seethe and whirl with all sorts of conjectures and torturing suspicions was the fact that the lovely, blossomy face upturned to his was not the face of a half-breed, but of a girl without a taint of Chinese blood!

She ran toward him, her hands outstretched, and addressed him in his own language, in a voice which might have been musical, but was now husky with weeping.

"How did you get in?" she gasped.
 "You have come just in time!"

"Melican man velly much damn fool!" sneered a soft male voice behind Alec.

IV.

CHANG LEE, the waiter, had not been asleep when Masters had risen and disappeared behind the screen of twisted bamboo trees.

His first impulse had been to run after the inquisitive American and warn him that no trespassers were allowed, but upon second thought he concluded to warn old Wun Sing and let him deal with the intruder as he wished.

Chang went quickly by an entrance through the kitchen to an apartment where Li Sing, Wun's third son and his favorite, was arraying himself in silks and fine linens.

Wun Sing was watching him. To-night was to see the fulfilment of his promise to his son—a promise made months before—that he should have a white wife, the lovely Chinook Winds.

His old face was creased in a saturnine smile. To-night also would see the culmination of his revenge upon one of the hated "Melican" race. Revenge was sweet!

Wun Sing was congratulating himself upon the peculiar devilishness of his scheme when in pattered Chang with the whispered information that a young American had just opened the door behind the screen and was now doubtless somewhere in the hallway.

"But the door was locked!" excitedly whispered old Wun Sing in his native tongue.

"You forgot; maybe you excited about the wedding. You forgot."

Which was true, only proving the fallibility of human nature. Old Wun Sing, who had guarded that door for so long, had, in his excitement over the culmination of his revenge, forgotten in this one instance to lock it.

Also, the sliding door which had always remained closed, the door that separated the girl's rooms from the other quarters, and where she was kept virtually a prisoner, this he had opened for the entrance of the bridal party—the guests who were smoking and

gambling in the rooms waiting for the time to arrive.

He had thought that with the outer door locked it was safe enough. Which would have been true, but he had forgotten to lock the outer door!

Thus it was that when Masters swung about he faced the saturnine glare of old Wun Sing's eyes and, peeping from one of the big, loose-flowing sleeves, the shining barrel of a revolver.

There came the sharp report of a revolver, a puff of smoke from the region of Masters's pocket, the hand of the old Chinaman loosed its grip, and the gun went clattering to the floor. Masters gave a lithe spring and buried his fingers in the other's fat throat.

He shook the old Celestial until the breath was out of him, then kicked him under the sofa just as the room became overpopulated with Chinamen.

All in gala attire they poured into the room, but this was not just the sort of ceremony they had been prepared to attend. They saw a young American with two revolvers, and back of him cowered the frightened girl.

"Follow me!" he directed the latter. "I'm going through or over that bunch."

At this moment a bullet whined past and grazed his shoulder, taking cloth and flesh impartially, and buried itself in the wall.

It was Chang Lee, the only one armed with a pistol, the others had knives. Masters fired and Chang Lee was out of the mêlée for good. The pain of Alec's wound had finished turning him into a fighting devil.

He began firing with both guns into the crowd. It was his and the girl's life or a bunch of miserable chinks. As he advanced they retreated, though with growls of hate and yelps of fear as the bullets lodged where Masters aimed.

The blood was streaming from the wound in his arm, his evening shirt was red with it, his face a livid fury; the two guns spoke again and the entire pack turned, going through the door into the restaurant beyond—save for the ones who remained behind from necessity.

Over these stepped Masters, the girl

close behind him. Not a sound had she made through all the excitement.

Masters knew enough of the cunning of the Oriental mind to apprehend that there would be an ambush prepared in the outer room, which was now in darkness. As he and the girl emerged from behind the screen two Celestials sprang at him, but a shot rang out and one of the Chinamen dropped. The girl had stooped and secured Chang Lee's gun as she had stepped over him, and as the event showed, she was not afraid to use it.

It was only a moment before the other chink was disposed of. It was necessary now to run the gantlet in the darkened room, but while the darkness could conceal foes, it also could hide them. Between them, they had three weapons.

They paused by the screen, and after a whispered consultation, fired six times in rapid succession into every part of the room. This resulted in clearing the way for their rush, which resulted in their finding the door locked. However, they found the low bay-window handy.

Masters's office, as has been said, was next door. Only a sleepy night watchman was on guard, and he was dropped by Masters's good right arm.

Reaching his own room he snapped on the electric lights and settled the girl in his big revolving chair.

She looked up at him, fright in her eyes. He was very white, where his face was not scratched and bleeding, his left arm hung useless now at his side, the excitement which had made him ignore rather a bad wound was wearing away. But he collected his reeling senses to reassure his companion, smiled as he ran through the telephone book to get a number, and kept up a little running fire of talk calculated to deceive the girl as to how groggy he felt.

The bright splotch of color that her silken draperies made, danced rather weirdly before his eyes, but while he was waiting for the connection, his brain magically cleared, and though the pain in his arm was intense, he found himself thinking clearly.

Who was this beautiful girl, and what terrible turn of fortune's wheel had landed her in the clutches of old Wun Sing?

At that moment Colonel Vining's aide picked up the connection. The colonel was out. Masters explained who he was and where he was; that he wished them to send him some soldiers and why.

And while he was explaining, he was looking at the girl in the chair. She had settled down and closed her eyes with a long sigh of mingled content and weariness. Her very helplessness made its inevitable appeal to a man of his fiber—poor, helpless little butterfly of a girl caught in the net of this wicked old Chinaman—in some way not her fault, of that he was certain. Poor little girl with the maddening eyes and the tender mouth and the blossomy face—all the beauty and sweetness and grace of her only served to make her misfortune seem the more poignant.

For Masters was a man of the world, and he had decided that it had been a cruel misfortune in every sense of the word.

When he at last hung up it seemed to him that eons had passed.

"I must do something for your arm!" the girl now exclaimed. "To think that your chivalry should have got you into such terrible trouble. I had never seen any one but you to whom I could appeal. In fact, I have never had an opportunity to appeal to any of my own people, so carefully have I been guarded. The place where you saw me has been my prison for three years; rarely have I been permitted to ride out even in the sedan chair—"

She swayed, and would have fallen, had not Masters caught her in his one sound arm. She did not lose consciousness, but clung to him shuddering.

"Tell me all about it," he said gently, "if it will relieve your mind."

His arm closed protectingly about her, she clung to him with soft hands, he breathed in the fragrance of her beautiful hair with its strange Chinese arrangement, her blossomy face was very near his own. He struggled against the temptation to kiss her and won.

"He was going to make me marry his third son, to whom he had promised a white wife—I was going to beat my head against the wall until I died if you had not come to my rescue—at the same time he would re-

venge himself—further revenge himself, I should say, against my father—my poor father who thinks I am dead—who would rather I had been drowned as he thinks me than to become the wife of a yellow man. Only one advantage came to me as the prospective bride of that horrible man's son—I was shielded and taken care of so that I should be in every way worthy—"

The girl paused and laughed a hard, bitter little laugh.

But that last sentence had lifted a weight off Masters's heart. At least her memories—which he was going to devote his life to making her forget—were not going to be so awful as he had at first conjectured.

"Sit down," he suggested gently. There was a far-away look in her eyes—a hollow note in her voice. She sank heavily into the chair again and babbled her strange story to the end.

"My father was Police Commissioner Lang of New York. He raided Wun Sing's place in Doyers Street where the old man sold opium, and where there were white girls. He sent old Wun Sing out of the country. One day, not long after, I was shopping on Fifth Avenue. Chang Lee must have bribed my chauffeur to let him put on his livery. I came out of one of the shops and gave the order to drive me home. I did not even glance at the man on the front seat. Livery of course makes men look more or less alike. The next thing I remember—they must have put some sort of stuff in the car the fumes of which stupefied me—anyhow, the next thing I remember, I was in a little trading vessel out at sea—a prisoner of old Wun Sing, who had thus revenged himself upon my father. I gathered that my parents, while keeping up a search for me, really thought I had been drowned, that I had wandered down to the river for some reason and had fallen in—we live on the Hudson some miles out—old Wun Sing told me that he had directed Chang Lee to place my hat and coat on the bank.

"He made me earn money by dancing, to compensate himself for the sum my father had made him lose. He was going to marry me to his son and then in some way let my father know where I was and what I was,

and make him think that I had done it of my own free will—"

The girl's voice trailed off into silence; she had slipped into unconsciousness as she ended her extraordinary tale.

"We'll bayonet the greasy old rat," muttered Alec as he bent over her in feverish anxiety. Just then he heard the measured tramp of feet in the hall.

The American soldiery had come!

V.

ELINOR LANG'S frightful experience culminated in a serious illness. She had been taken that night to kind Mrs. Vining, the colonel's wife, in their apartment in the Svetlandskaya.

But when the American soldiery raided the Chinese restaurant there was not a pigtail to be found. They had vanished, vanished, every mother's son of them. Which was, perhaps, just as well, as the American soldiers had been primed with the story of the American girl detained against her will by old Wun Sing, and they were ripe for reprisal.

Her father was cabled to and crossed as fast as steam would carry him. Gradually Elinor was coaxed into taking up life again.

When she was able to travel they took her home. She and Masters stood beside the rail one night as the great ship was speeding under the starlight toward what we call West. The Golden Gate was nearly reached—all about them stretched the peaceful Pacific, dimpling and coquetting under the soft stare of the stars.

Elinor gazed up at the tall figure beside her.

"If that was the only way that we could have met," she began softly, "I cannot regret my terrible experiences!"

Alec smiled down at her in quick understanding.

"Fate has rather a curious way of gathering atoms from the furthestmost corners of the earth and bringing them together at the psychological moment," he answered. "But, dear, you are to forget the past and think only of the present, and perhaps just a little of the future."

He slipped his arm around her and she laid her cheek against his rough coat sleeve.

The Torch

by Jack Bechdolt

Author of "Driftwood," "Salvage," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

AFTER the great catastrophe of 1980-1989, when the island of Manhattan had reverted to medieval standards, one Fortune, petty captain under Wolff the Great, towerman of the city, set out to report his defense of the northern wall against the Wild People. Of Fortune there ran a rime as follows:

Fortune, the White,
Fortune, the White
Shall rule in might
Till the Torch burns bright.

Here the Tower People, as they were known, held in subjection a lesser race of slaves called the Folk, who inhabited the ancient warrens known as the Sub-Ways. Fortune had performed a miracle in defending the wall, as his guard had been reduced by half, due to a mysterious order the day previous, and on his journey with his servant, Ham, after a veiled threat from Frederick, the comptroller, the two, master and man, barely escaped an ambush, Fortune later having a quarrel thrust upon him as he awaited audience with Wolff. Alda, Wolff's daughter, assured him that this was the hand of Frederick, as proved by a talisman worn by one of Fortune's assailants—a ring bearing the device of a snake—although this was unknown, even to Wolff.

On leave, Fortune, visiting the isle of the Great Woman in search of a girl who had, on a previous visit, mightily interested him, was set upon by a giant, one Shard, when he attempted to kidnap the girl. He sought refuge in the Tower of the Great Woman, but captured by the giant through a ruse, and his servant slain, he was saved from instant death only by the intervention of the girl, Mary, thereafter being allowed the freedom of the isle on his promise not to attempt escape. But he felt that he was well watched. For the isle was a hotbed of conspiracy against the existing order, the conspirators believing that one day the Torch would burn again—the Torch which was missing from the hand of the Great Woman—the Goddess of Liberty: Thus were they known as Comrades of the Torch.

The situation Fortune now faced comprised the alternative of joining the Comrades, headed by one Zorn, or—death. Given a month in which to decide, after Mary had definitely rejected his suit, at the last moment, through the connivance of one Kinst, a gold-worker, Fortune escaped, and, together with Alda, planned the downfall of the Comrades. Fame and ambition beckoned, but, somehow, of himself he had a poor opinion indeed.

CHAPTER XI.

WHISPERS OF HOPE.

SOMETHING was winging through the Under City of Manhattan—something intangible yet more potent than Wolff's guard; fragile as gossamer yet everlasting as the stream of human life. It passed from lip to lip, and it brightened dull eyes and acted on men like strong drink; still it had no substance except in the mind. It was hope.

An immortal idea, never dead though long forgotten, had come to rebirth. It brought light in the blackest midnight of

civilization, and wherever the folk heard its name, life took on a new meaning. Tomorrow loomed through the gray desolation of their days as a golden promise.

In these curious, underground trainways that honeycombed the island, beneath the crumbling walls of old New York, and under the jungles where only wild beasts moved, there were more than a score of such cantonments as that which Fortune ruled. They had been purposely isolated by walling in the old holes so that one group of the Tower People's slaves was ignorant of the life of another.

Yet the whispering penetrated every-

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where. Masonry walls were no barrier. The guards of the Under City, alert to check anything that promised trouble, could not stop it—did not even discern this new menace.

Through the blind and foul old bores, almost impassable from falls of earth, poisonous with the pocketed air of ages, seeping through the Directorate's barriers like the water that eternally dripped from the free air above, passed the word inspired by Zorn, the recluse, from his shelter in the ruined figure of the Great Woman.

The Torch will burn again!

The weavers heard it, and their dull eyes lighted and their pale cheeks flushed. Laborers staggering like laden beasts under the weight of the bales and beams they bore, turned their faces upward and breathed deeper as if they already sniffed free air. Smiths beating the molten metal discovered a new significance to their labors.

In the cantonment of the masons, one night late in June, a draggled, weary woman sat close by the family fire, a half-dozen undersized children pressed about her. She was no beautiful picture, this sal-low-faced woman with stringy hair, prematurely aged by her privations, ruling with a harsh hand and waspish voice the pallid-faced cubs who fought around her.

Nor did her brood, not even the smallest, possess that young, animal grace that is the charm of babyhood. The struggle for survival had robbed them of birthright. Their eyes were large and glittering and ringed by black circles that told of under-nourishment. Their cheeks were pinched, their faces wrinkled.

Though somewhere above their heads there was free air, warm and fragrant with coming summer, in the cantonment the fire was always welcome, for these clammy walls forever held the cold.

It was the whining demand of a boy of seven who pressed against her knee that brought a rapt, docile silence to the snapping, whimpering cubs. "I want to hear the story," he insisted. "Tell us the story again! Tell us about when the Torch will burn."

With a heavy sigh at the mockery of it,

the woman began. The small heads pressed close about her, to catch every word of her poor imaginings. Now and again a shrill voice, held to a fearful whisper—for such things were forbidden by the police of the Under City—made a querulous correction in the familiar tale.

For generations this was a common scene—a scene as homely as a mother suckling her infant. In such places as these; among such groups the idea had renewed its life and passed from one age to another, a fantastic, distorted fairy tale believed by the eager minds of children, scoffed at in their later years, yet saved to tell again to their children when children came. No man could have told why it lived or how. We only know that hope dies hard.

Even while the little group listened the man of that family had collected a dozen of his fellows about him, off in a corner where they could whisper unheard. He was a bowed and shuffling figure, with a hairy face that had been blotched with frequent accretions of mortar into strange, white spots that contrasted with its general dirt. His eyes were little and sunken, and the rims were red from the constant irritation of lime.

Rubbing his wrinkled hands until the dry, leathery skin threw off a little cloud of white dust, he fumbled inside his smock and produced a small, metal object held with awkward care. Slowly it passed from one calloused hand to another while his companions peered and grunted.

"You all see, hey? You see what it is?" the owner of the object whispered harshly.

"H-m, not I!" one insisted who was half blind. He held his cupped hand close before his eyes and peered harder at what he held.

"You fool," chuckled another, "'tis the Torch. Bah, the man's blind—"

"No, no!" the near-sighted man grumbled. "Now I make it out. So it is; so it is! The Torch made of gold, too. Hah, Murph, you stole it?"

"I did not," Murph denied hotly. "Don't I know the penalty for looting in the ruins? Well, of course! No, it's far stranger than that. Listen, boys—come closer!

"This afternoon while we were all busy on that new wall near Frederick's tower," Murph went on eagerly, "about midway to evening, our guard got drowsy with the warm air and stretched himself behind a stone pile, well out of sight of his captain, you may be sure!

"None of the rest of the lads noticed it; but I did, and don't you forget! Poor fools, they're stronger than I, and they slaved away like ants in that blazing sun; but wise old Murph, who's got misery in his bones, but a sharp eye in his head, keeps his eye on the guard.

"So I slowed down and slowed down, and got a couple minutes to sniff the air and stretch my old back. Then, to get a rest I made up an errand for more mortar—you lads know how it is! So I climbed down from my wall and scuffed along toward the mixers, keeping an eye on my guard all the time. And in a deep corner I met a man. 'Oh-o!' says I. 'You're a stranger, eh?' He was dressed like us boys, but he wasn't any fellow I ever saw.

"He beckoned me closer. 'Here,' he says, 'see this? You know what it is?'

"'Do I know it!' says I. 'So does every kid in the Under City know it so well he'd recognize it anywhere. But you'd better look sharp, friend, and put it away. You know what the Tower People will do if they find it on you!'

"'Take it,' says he, 'keep it, and show it to your comrades in the cantonment. Tell them from me it is a sign they will some day rise and seize their freedom.'

"'And who are you?' says I. 'A Comrade of the Torch,' he answered me; 'you will hear more of us later. In a few days I will see you here again and bring you news of the great meeting the Folk are planning, the meeting to arrange their arming against the Tower People. Meantime tell your fellows what I say to you. Don't despair, for I promise you the day is coming. And, above all things,' says he, very particular, 'make no attempt at revolt until you get the word. If you betray our secret you betray yourself as well. Be careful!'

"He motioned me to go on about my business. I looked back in a moment and he was gone."

That same night the mason told his story, while the whispering ran through all the city and penetrated even to the dismal prisons in the Drains, where men shivered and scratched at the vermin and hoped dully for death to end their suffering—that same night in which the Tower People went about their affairs, happy in their stolen ease—Kinst, the little goldsmith, and his woman, Anna, entertained guests in the secret arsenal of the Comrades.

This arsenal was hidden in one of the blind and shut-off tunnels. Its entrance was a secret guarded religiously by those few of the Folk who knew. Those who came followed a dark and dangerous path, that climbed sometimes roof-high over fallen debris; that led them through deep and slimy pools and among black pockets where the squealing rats became an actual menace to any man that dared linger.

But finally this path opened on a wider hole, a part of the ancient subways in fair preservation. Here, in the past, two tunnels had branched and in the crotch of their branching there stood a curious, three-cornered house of masonry. In its day it must have served in the complicated operation of the old system of trains; now it was the home of Kinst, and the office of the arsenal.

A bright, red glow shone from its underground windows and within the place was warm, for Kinst's furnace was burning red at the urging of his bellows.

Close by a dim lamp crouched the woman Anna, stitching with untiring fingers, as women of all ages have sat and stitched, turning her eyes frequently to her man, sweating and red-faced as he watched his coals and the molten metals in his little crucible.

And before the furnace, where it could bask in the glow, stretched a cat. It was a curious, half-wild animal that had come to live with Kinst and his woman, such a cat as one still sees rarely in forlorn places, a pariah of a once proud strain. It was a dirty yellow in color. Its head was small and flat, with a wicked, crafty mask of face. Its body was powerful, and it was savage in disposition.

There had just joined this domestic group two visitors, one the giant Shard, who stood

with head bent forward to avoid hitting the low ceiling, grinning good-naturedly at the fire; the other Tringe, the crooked-backed man. Tringe's keen eyes were intent with professional interest on Kinst's metal and the manipulation of the furnace.

"There," sighed Kinst finally, "I can pour. This will make twenty more of the little torches—we're spreading the light, eh, comrades?"

"Ho-ho, spread the light, that's it!" Shard approved boisterously, and his huge voice sent the cat snarling into the shadow. "Aye, spread the light. They're tiny, but Folk can see by them."

"Yes, they're going everywhere," Tringe mused complacently. "Every cantonment must have received at least one by now. I tell you, the Folk are beginning to buzz!"

"And presently they'll begin to swarm—and to sting, too!" roared Shard. In his exuberance he cracked his head hard against the ceiling and interrupted himself to call a hearty curse upon the house of Kinst before he subsided, cross-legged, to the floor, looming monstrous in the glow.

Kinst fluttered anxiously about his molds. The stench of hot metal and burning grease rose thick. Finally the gold-worker turned on them.

"At last, that's done. Now, Tringe, let us see that blessed flag Mary has sent us. Anna, look well. Here's your task!"

"Yes, it's made by Mary's own hands," Tringe boasted eagerly as he took a roll of silk from under his jacket. "Every stitch of it blessed by her love. Look!"

All eyes turned on the fluttering silk he held high, releasing its folds until it was revealed, a brave banner. The field was half white, half blue, and thrusting across it diagonally was a hand that bore a flaming torch—this in red.

"The banner that will lead us to freedom!" cried Tringe, his voice shrill with pride and excitement.

The others marvelled in silence. Finally Anna found her tongue. "The pretty," she murmured, "the pretty!" Her fingers caressed the silk and raised it tenderly to her lips.

The others said nothing, but their eyes glowed strangely.

"You can make others like it, you can?" Kinst spoke huskily.

"Yes, yes—with the cloth given me. All you wish. Ah, dear gods, how happy I'll be at this task!"

Even Anna's plain face seemed to borrow a momentary beauty from something fine within her.

"Hey, that's so, how about the silks?" Shard exclaimed.

"Solf, the weaver is bringing them—stolen from Wolff's own stores," Tringe explained.

"Yes, and Solf is here." The door had opened as Tringe spoke to admit the long-haired weaver who bore more rolls of silk.

"That's a good job done," the weaver sighed wearily. "A fine time we had getting them and a fine time I had bringing them—but here we are." His eyes turned to the flag Tringe held out so proudly. "Hey!" he exclaimed. "Gay thing, that, very gay, comrades!"

Solf inspected the flag critically. "I could have done no better on my loom," he pronounced.

"Ho," you hear him?" scoffed Shard roughly. "You hear what he says? He could do no better himself—he admits it!"

"I could do as well, I tell you, I could," Solf snarled.

"Oh, yes, oh, yes, make a flag as fine as our Mary can—ah—"

"Come, come," Kinst mollified them, "why dispute about that? It's a noble banner and blessed by the gracious lady who gives it. Why quarrel—ah, here's still another come in. Hello, Gross, more shields to-night?"

"Spear-heads and six swords," answered Gross, the sooty-faced armorer. "The piles grow, eh, Kinst?"

"The day comes soon enough," Shard growled anxiously.

"But the Folk will be ready!" It was Kinst who reassured them. "I tell you they're ripe for this—"

"Yes, yes, they'll fight," Gross agreed. "Give us men to lead them well and that banner there will float from Wolff's Tower."

"May it be soon!" Tringe exclaimed fervently.

"Soon!" all echoed.

"And what a day it will be," declared the weaver ecstatically. "I don't mind saying I've got my eye already on a certain tower where the loot is going to make a rich man of me—"

"No better than mine, the place I choose," chuckled the armorer. "There's fine stuff there will be ready for the taking—and a certain woman, a High-born, mind you. I've marked her for mine—"

"Not so fine as the one I've chosen," boasted the weaver. "Loot, eh, comrades? That makes your eyes bright! You say so?"

"Here, here," growled Shard anxiously, "we'll have to keep order, you know—keep discipline till the job's done and we've set up government."

"No looting," murmured Tringe, shaking his head. "Let the Folk dispose. There must be government—"

Kinst nodded sagely.

"Well, government surely," the weaver agreed. "That's all right, and none will obey quicker than I, but mean time, for that little space when the Tower People go down and the air is filled with the dust of their fall—ah, a wise man can do much then!"

"I know one wise man who can," the armorer agreed, laughing.

"I don't like that weaver, nor that armorer. They talk too much of looting." Shard made his complaint to Tringe as they were taking their way back to the Isle of the Great Woman.

"Nor I," Tringe agreed. "Yet where there are many men you'll find many notions. Freedom! None of us quite agree what it will bring, my friend. One talks of taking a tower for his own; another of drinking all the wine he can hold; another of a woman. Kinst sees his son born into a better world; you grumble about a field to plant and have for your own; and I? Well, I'm not sure just what I'll have—a better place to put my workshop, I think. None of us see the thing alike—"

"Will we ever agree, then?" the giant gloomed.

"No, but there's one blessing on our cause—"

"And that?"

"A man to lead us wise enough to choose the right path and strong enough to keep our feet from straying—we have Zorn."

"Gods be thanked."

"Amen to that," nodded Tringe.

So the month of June passed on.

The Directorate buzzed with secret activity. Wolff's adherents and powerful friends met in counsel, and preparations began to gather the armed forces necessary to check rebellion.

Alda's white cheeks began to borrow the color of excitement as she planned and directed in anticipation of triumph.

And in the tunnels of the Under City, wherever the Folk gathered by night, sped the whispers of hope.

June ended and July came in. With it came definite word of the great meeting. From mouth to mouth instructions passed. Men were named to lead the delegations to the secret place chosen by Zorn.

From hand to hand passed the little metal torches Kinst was fashioning, talismans of freedom. And wherever they passed they kindled a spark in hearts long cold. Men were ready now to believe.

After generations of darkness; when the dream itself had almost passed; emerging from the mists that veiled the time before the Great Catastrophe, came the Torch.

The fabled symbol of freedom—the symbol that legend said once was held aloft by the Great Woman of the Isle, had returned to despondent men.

The Torch would burn!

Already thousands of eager eyes watched for its flame.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLACK MORNING.

ON the West Side of Manhattan, in what must have been in its time the most crowded district of the ancient New York, stood a huge ruin of gray stone, almost entirely obliterated by the jungle growth. It had been one of the great train stations of the ancients.

Against this massive structure, built so that it would seem that time itself could

not harm it, the Great Catastrophe had shown a violent spite so that its mighty pillars lay toppled and buried under rank forest growth; its courts and halls stood open to the sky in a weedy desolation, and only wild animals sought it for shelter.

And for a mile all about the spot the forest grew thick, and the ancient pomp and circumstance of civilization had been leveled.

But beneath the earth the old station was little harmed. Platforms of great length where the electric trains common before the Great Catastrophe had taken and discharged their millions of passengers, still existed, and, opening on these, the old tunnels that honeycombed the island.

This underground refuge was known to a few of the Folk who had fled to the abandoned subways to escape slavery. The morning of the first Sunday of July it was occupied by about one hundred of the Comrades of the Torch. They had selected a place for the meeting of the Folk, a hall of tremendous width and breadth, from one end of which a great stairway ascended to the ruins above. This had been made ready, in a rude way, for the assembling of the great crowd.

There were vast piles of torches gathered, and a multitude of lamps. The wide stairway had been chosen as a stage, and this was dressed in silks of red, white, and blue. Suspended from above, half-way of the height of the stair, and serving as a background, was the flag of the revolution, a larger banner copied from the original made by Mary.

All these preparations had been finished. Interest now centered about a lighted space where Tringe squatted, bent over lists written on paper. One at a time the crooked-backed man was identifying the guides chosen to bring the Folk through the secret tunnels, and issuing to them their final instructions.

"That's the last," said Tringe finally, nodding his great head with satisfaction. "Twenty-five cantonments accounted for. Each man will bring half the strength of his own place. That should make, roughly, fifteen—no, closer to twenty thousand of the Folk. Think of it, twenty thousand!

"You understand, all of you, each is to choose the ablest and the strongest? Leave women and children behind, and bring only your best. Now slip back to your own places and remember, each must start his delegation in time to arrive here the second hour after midnight. Off with you!"

"It will succeed?" questioned the gigantic Shard. "You think it can be done, comrade?"

"Why not!" Tringe shrugged. "It's simple enough for a child to understand. Now you, Shard, you'd better be getting back to the isle with your picked men. You've a task of your own—to bring Zorn and Mary safely here at the hour. You can't afford to fail us."

"I'm off, off directly," Shard agreed. He shook himself briskly, like a great dog. "Gods!" he exclaimed, his little eyes glowing. "To think I should live to see this day! If only we can trust the Folk—"

"We must trust them—it is their cause," Tringe answered solemnly.

An hour or so after this interview, Solf, the weaver, appeared unobtrusively among the Folk of his cantonment. Absent-mindedly, he brushed from his blue smock spots of muddy water and streaks of dirt.

His appearance was the signal for many curious, eager looks from his fellows. The secret now was common property. Men knew where Solf had been.

One or two bolder ones tried to question him, but these Solf discouraged. They must not be seen whispering.

So Solf strolled with elaborate unconcern to his own particular niche beneath an arch, and stretched himself on his pile of rags as if to sleep. As he did so a soldier who had been watching from a distance slipped quietly away through the shadows to rejoin three comrades of the guard. "Come," he nodded to them. "He's away from the common fire now, and this is our chance. Remember the orders—no noise, and, if we can help it, we must not be seen!"

Thus it happened that Solf, the weaver, stricken dumb with terror and doubly insured against giving alarm by a gag tied between his jaws, was quietly spirited from his couch and taken from the Under City.

The weaver's pasty face was a mask of abject fright when he found the soldiers were taking him to Wolff's Tower. The men who brought him had to support his weight as they dragged him and pushed him along corridors and up stairs. When they reached the place they had been ordered to bring their prisoner they vented their relief by hurling him bodily to the hard floor.

Solf looked up fearfully into the face of Overcaptain Fortune. A moment later another joined the young captain, a white-faced woman whose hair was copper hued, clad in a twining gown of brilliant, changeable green silk. She eyed the shaking weaver with a hard contempt.

"This is the man?" questioned Alda.

"This is the man. Here, one of you guards, cut that rag that ties his jaws."

The gag was taken from Solf's mouth. His hands were untied. He rubbed his throat and waggled his jaw, but he did not dare rise in the presence of these Tower People.

"Here, weaver, look—and listen to me." Fortune took up a heavy sack and untied its mouth. He poured into his hand a golden stream of coins—the coin used by the Tower People. He jingled them delectably. "Look," he bade, "the sack is full. See how heavy it is!"

Solf left off rubbing his jaws and stared. A hard, cunning look came into his glittering eyes.

"Here, in this sack, is the worth of a tower," Fortune went on. "There's enough to make any man rich for life. Now, listen, you dog. You've been licking your lips thinking about the loot you'll take when the Folk rise—oh, we know, we know! D'you think we did not know all the time the plans and plots you were making?"

"Well, here's loot enough to make any comrade's heart glad. And down there at the tower entrance is a great, wooden door. You've seen that, have you? Tell me, did you ever see a man nailed against a door like that, hands and feet spread wide with great spikes driven through his flesh—dying slowly, miserably? Ah, you have! Well, Solf, you're lucky this time, for I'm going to give you your choice; tell us what

you know, and you'll be rich; refuse and you die.

"Which will it be, money or the door?"

Solf had no answer to give. He continued to grovel and stare, his mouth hanging open.

"Answer," Fortune insisted, "which will it be?" Still the weaver sat dumb.

Fortune beckoned to his soldiers. "Take this man to the great door—nail him up," he ordered.

Solf threw himself, shrieking, upon the floor. "Wait, wait," he babbled, "no, I'll do it—I'll tell it—anything, whatever you wish. Let me speak—speak—"

"Very well." Fortune waved the guard back. "Now, lose no time answering me after this. About that meeting of the Folk early to-morrow morning: How do they go? At what hour? How many? Tell me the plan entire. And remember, we already have the story, so if you lie to us—"

"I will. I'll tell the truth, all of it," Solf gulped. "Listen, I'll give every detail, but—give me my money."

Fortune shoved the heavy sack at the weaver with his foot. "You soldiers," he bade, "wait just outside the door, in easy call, and one of you inform Supreme Commander Wenn that we are awaiting him here."

Shortly after midnight, throughout the Under City, began a stealthy movement. Silent groups of men assembled in shadowy corners. Everywhere there was a faint stirring and whispering, and the thrill of suppressed excitement.

Unchallenged by any police guards, these groups began to move into the tunnels, each guided by one or more men who knew the secret paths. The gloom of the old bores swallowed them up, and those who stayed at home muttered prayers to speed their steps and bring them safely back again with news of the Torch.

That night the abandoned tunnels swarmed with the men in blue denim. Silent companies, they passed slowly, fearfully under Manhattan byways that were strange, until they came to the brightly lighted place of assembly and crowded slowly into the great hall beneath the ruins.

And as each company moved through the tunnel entrances into the hall the leaders, had they thought to count heads, would have found its numbers increased by almost half.

Had they looked, these leaders would have discovered strange faces—the faces of soldiers of the Tower People covered in the universal blue uniform of servitude, worn over their chain mail.

While the Folk assembled, crowding to their places about the great stair where Zorn was to appear with the word they waited, these soldiers lingered in the shadows, each group closing one of the exits of that strange meeting-place.

It was midnight, too, that Fredericks the comptroller, was summoned to Wolff's Tower. There he found the assembled Directorate and heard from the smiling lips of the Towerman news that made him gnaw his beard with vexation.

The Red Fox saw that his ignorance of this menace to Tower rule had discredited him.

The humiliating discovery was to find a woman had outwitted him. But when he learned, as he soon did, that Alda was advised and guided by Fortune, the comptroller's annoyance turned to cold and calculating anger.

Like the Folk, that brilliant assembly of armed men and their soldiers got into motion promptly. Guides led them through the forests and among forgotten ruins of dead New York. It was a weird and fearsome journey by which this little group of officials of the Tower People came at length to the rendezvous of the Folk.

Eventually the found themselves ensconced in the shadow of a little balcony that overlooked the lighted hall beneath, witnesses to the drama which, to all but a half-dozen, was news of most alarming import.

In the front rank of that awed little group of witnesses were Alda, Fortune, and Frederick. Their balcony was not more than fifteen feet above the heads of the crowd that waited below, and not a dozen feet from the great stair where the banner of revolt rippled lazily and the stage awaited the entrance of its chief actors, yet so in-

adequate were all the torches to lighten the gloom of the vast hall that they could peer from the shadows unseen.

From the crowding Folk there rose a low buzz of sound. Caution and the habit of years suppressed their noise. They waited, eager, half afraid, puzzled for whatever was to happen.

Back into the dim shadows their ranks extended, solid like a carpet of blue stippled with white faces. Where torches flared little circles of light fell in ruddier glow on their compact bodies, patterning the vast mass like some strange, unheard of tapestry.

The wide spaces of the ruin vibrated to one low, whispering chord, the exhalation of thousands of throats—a chord that thrilled the soul of a listener with the intoxication of excitement.

Already the Folk were tasting freedom.

The flag on the stair was swept aside and a vast sigh rose from the crowd.

A tall, spare figure in black, gray-haired, lean, ascetic, walked forward into the full glow of the torches. Zorn, the Recluse, stood surveying the people to whose salvation he had devoted the best of his life. To most of the multitude Zorn was entirely a stranger. They had never heard his name, yet the eyes that stared on him recognized instinctively that here stood their leader. Zorn's was a power instantly felt.

A few paces behind Zorn advanced a slender, youthful figure in gray, a woman whose beauty seemed supernatural in the glow of light that flooded her. She walked bare-headed, erect, free of motion, with the dignity of the highest-born and the innocent grace of trusting young womanhood.

Men paid her homage unconsciously. A long, drawn "Ah-h!" greeted her entry.

Fortune pressed forward from the balcony, staring his eyes out. His lean jaw tightened with excitement. A heightened color flooded his cheek. His wide eyes glowed darkly.

Alda, pressed beside him, whispered: "So that is the girl, my friend! That is the girl of the Folk?"

The question was unanswered. Fortune had not heard it.

But Frederick, on her right, was staring,

too. He shook off his glance at last and his eyes met Alda's.

"You saw, too?" he muttered. "You saw! What a woman it is—what a woman! To have her a man would give—everything. Even I, old as I am—"

Alda bit her lip in vexation. She was accustomed to holding all eyes, and the unconscious sincerity of both men annoyed her sharply. She glanced again at Fortune's rapt face and became engrossed in her own thoughts.

Behind Zorn and Mary there now appeared a half-dozen Comrades of the Torch, who bore arms. And with them were Shard the giant, and Tringe, the misshapen little man whose ugly face leered down upon the crowd in triumph.

Zorn's upraised hand brought silence to the staring throng. The last whispers died away under the low arches. Men waited the word.

Zorn spoke. His voice had a musical vibration, deep-pitched, that carried it far:

"Men of the Folk, I come before you in the name of that freedom that is your birthright—that freedom of which you have been shamefully robbed. You have been brought here by the Comrades of the Torch that you may learn what are your rights and how you may take them from the Tower People who have stolen them. The hour has come to strike—"

A tremendous shout drowned out Zorn's voice. It came spontaneously from the thousands who had dreamed all their days of this hour, dreamed without daring to hope it would come to them. It was such a shout as to sweep back the little group in the balcony as if its noise had been tangible, and could bowl them down.

It did not die instantly, but rose and fell in a long, wavering succession of cheering that swept, echoing, out through ruined passages and tunnels as if it would flood every nook and niche of all the Under City.

Fortune found his arm grasped tight by Wolff himself. The Great Towerman clung to him like a terrified child. Unconsciously he tried to shrug from that clutch.

"Hark!" he shouted rudely at Wolff's ear. "Listen now—listen! The bugles!"

Piercing the dying clamor came a new note, high-pitched, metallic, triumphant—the fanfare of trumpets!

Insistent, compelling above all other noise the shrill, strident call of the trumpets rose in ecstasy, and as ears comprehended the menace of this new sound, a terrible silence fluttered down.

Then the rattle of steel.

The banner of the revolution was snatched away in a flash and down the great stair charged soldiers of the Tower People with drawn swords.

And at the same time, from every corner swords were flashing while armed men advanced.

Dumb with terror, milling in a vast, swirling confusion like frightened cattle, packed in to suffocation and helpless, the Folk found themselves surrounded—betrayed.

A bellow of insane fury drew all eyes to the stair. Unarmed, leading that pitiful knot that guarded Zorn and Mary, Shard had sprung to meet the advancing soldiers.

The first man he charged low and his great arms seized his legs below the thighs. The soldier was swept high in Shard's arms, face agape, swung in a great arc and sent hurtling into the packed mass below.

With a yell and clatter the soldier's comrades leaped to the fight. A furious knot of them struggled about the raging giant. Another body flew high over their heads and down the stair.

About Shard men fell to right and left and some of them did not rise again.

"Look, look!" Wolff shrilled in Fortune's ear. "They've got him—that black-robed man. They've got Zorn—no, oh, gods! Yes, yes, see—now he's fast!"

"And the woman—the girl!" Frederick shouted. "Now they're taking her down the stair—"

"Yes, and Zorn, too. They're bringing them this way—see the Folk fall back out of their way. The dogs, they'll bark no more at my soldiers."

Wolff was leaning now far from the balcony.

"That giant, he's broken through. He's gone," Alda was crying. "And that crooked little man—I saw him dart away, crawling

under a man's legs. Ah, look, Fortune, they're bringing the girl this way—see, there goes your famous beauty, your dear love!”

Now Fortune thrust aside Wolff and Frederick and peered down. A knot of soldiers had struggled down the stair and was moving slowly below them. In their midst he saw Mary. Of all that mad throng she was serene.

She held her head high and she looked about her fearlessly. Her face was pale, but beautiful with a courage that glowed.

Fortune stared on her and a sob choked in his throat.

This was his doing. He had brought Mary to this!

His sob translated abruptly into a gasp. His gray eyes widened and turned suddenly black with rage.

A choking cry burst from his lips. “You filthy devil—you dare strike her. I’ll—”

The threat dissolved in sudden action. In a flash he crowded back those about him. He had hurled himself from the balcony before they realized.

Staring down they saw the armed group dissolve with his fall. The soldier who had struck Mary was among those downed. Before he could rise Fortune's sword had pierced his body.

Then the young captain wheeled on the man's startled companions. At his word of command they closed about Mary and moved away.

CHAPTER XIII.

ASHES OF FREEDOM.

ACTING according to prearranged plan, Wolff's soldiers struck quickly and with organized effectiveness. In a few minutes excitement had quieted. The Folk found themselves deprived of their leaders and the packed thousands huddled, uncertain what to do.

The glorious morning that had been Zorn's life ambition had dawned black. The thing men had dreamed of all their days and longed for with the bitter longing of despair had lingered a second within their grasp, only to vanish like all their dreams—

dissolving into the harsh reality of life as it was.

Had this multitude been left long idle, in its present state of mind it might have acted in some manner; undoubtedly it would have acted. But the clever planning of Alda had foreseen this moment.

When the arrests had been completed and the soldiers thus engaged were gone the return of quiet was again interrupted by the bugles. Now they shrieked and blared their triumph, and down the stair where the banner of the Torch lay trampled and still bodies huddled like heaps of rags, through blood and litter, came a score of musicians in the flaming red of Wolff's livery. Behind these moved an armed guard in glittering array, and after them Wolff himself, Alda on one side, and Frederick, alert to take what advantage he could of events, at his left.

Compared to that black-robed man who had so recently moved in silent dignity along that same striking perspective, the Great Towerman cut a poor figure. His slight form, for all its splendid yellow robe, glittering with trappings now revealed by discarding his cloak, advanced hesitantly, half fearfully. His pale face, with curling black hair and dandified beard framing its vacuity, suggested more of mean, gloating triumph than right justified.

Wolff suffered, too, in comparison with his companions. Alda moved always with a queenly air, insolent, powerful, and sure. Frederick's great body was held in military pomp. The robust comptroller was the pattern of a man to appear well in public.

After this trio followed the various directors of government, the hated officials of the Tower People, and behind them more soldiers.

Finally came several servants with a great flag. In a brief time they had made fast this banner to the same tackle that had lifted the banner of freedom, and its crimson folds rose slowly, displaying the brilliant red field with the golden tower, symbol of Wolff's authority.

The trumpets ceased their bragging march. The Great Towerman stepped forward until he stood out alone, ahead of all his company. He had no need to invoke

silence. The silence was oppressive. No word was spoken, but from the lips of the Folk came an elusive ghost of a sound, a faint and sustained hissing that spoke their terrible hatred.

Wolff hesitated, his head cocked to one side, his white, slim hands combing nervously at his little beard. He began to speak abruptly in that habitual whining, shrill voice that grew in volume as his assurance grew.

"Folk of the Under City, you have done ill. You have defied the government divinely ordained to protect your welfare. The gods are displeased, and they have brought ruin to your foolish planning.

"The Directorate is grieved at your madness," Wolff whined reprovingly. "If anything is wrong, if injustice has been done you, our benevolent system of government gives you easy means to seek correction. Every man, woman, and child among you has the right to bring his grievance before me, by means of the police of the Under City. They are my ordained agents of justice.

"But you thought to defy me." Wolff's tone grew querulous, then angry. "You thought to throw down those who guard you, who guide you. There is wicked murder in your hearts. You dare defy the will of Divinity itself. Ay, you would gladly kill me. I know!

"Now you must do penance.

"Those persons who have dared put murder in your hearts are in my prisons. They will pay for this. And so shall you all!

"Listen to the judgment of Wolff. This is my will that you shall do:

"For three days the Tower People will deprive every man, woman, and child of the Under City of work. You shall sit idle. Ay, and you'll go hungry, for do not the laws say that he who does no work shall not be fed?

"That is the penance you shall do for this night. It is not all. Later the Directorate will publish its will concerning other privileges you must give up. Don't think to escape unscathed.

"Now go you back to your cantonments. Soldiers, see that my will is done. Later the Under City shall see what comes

to those who dared preach sedition in Manhattan!"

Wolff raised his right hand high above his head and unconsciously the fist doubled in a gesture of menace. "Back with you!" he shouted with all the power of his crackling voice. "Go back!"

He turned and hastily rejoined his companions. The soldiers closed in ahead and behind him. The great flag was swept aside, and he disappeared up the stair.

Then from every corner of the vast hall came the harsh commands of the armed men. Every soldier of the Tower People who could possibly be spared was there, perhaps six or seven thousand of them in all.

The confusion was terrible, but there was little resistance, for those who complained were punished with swift death.

Long hours elapsed before the last stragglers were herded into the underground passages. In the free world above the sun was long past noon before the melancholy processions underground had ended.

In bitter humility the men who once dared to hope were driven back to their cold kennels. The flame that had promised to warm their lives and light their steps toward freedom was quenched in birth. Their wrists still galled with the metal bracelets of slavery and their eyes were dull with apathetic despair.

The promise had failed.

With a deadly suddenness that assured his authority, Fortune had taken command of the knot of soldiers who held Mary. He led them from the underground hall along old passages that were cold with the breath of the ruins.

They traversed strange places and their torches frightened bats and small bird life and sent the hungry rats scurrying. It was fully a quarter of an hour before the captain began to plan. His first insane fury passed. Now that he had saved Mary from rough treatment, what to do with her?

A sifting of gray light down a stair suggested an exit from underground. He led the little company upward. They came out into a vast, roofless space heaped high with the debris of the old train station. After

several false starts they found a way through this labyrinth of broken stone blocks and vine-hung arches into the forest. The night sky was paling before the approaching sun.

Up to now Fortune had spoken no word to Mary. He had avoided her glances. Impelled by necessity, he addressed her with averted looks.

"Our way through the forest will be hard and long. Can you walk? If you would rather, two of the men can carry you."

"I can walk."

Her tone was neither cold nor reproachful, as he had feared. She answered him as one would address a stranger, without interest of any sort.

"Very well," he agreed. "March, men!" This was no place to discuss their relations.

Three hours later, in the fresh morning of a splendid July day, they quit the jungle and found again the open streets. A soldier, mounted, passed near them. Fortune ordered him from the horse and commanded it for his prisoner. For a moment, as he helped Mary to mount, her hand touched his. It was ice-cold.

What to do with Mary he had but a faint idea. He was acting entirely on his own responsibility, actuated by private emotions for which, no doubt, he would later have to make explanations to his superiors.

But on one point he was determined—they should not put this girl into any of the terrible prisons kept for the Folk!

Cortland thought hard as he led his little company. If he would save Mary from the very real and terrible dangers of incarceration in the Towerman's prisons, he must imprison her in some place of his own. He had no prison!

But he had Mary, and he did not intend to lose her—at least, until he had time to persuade her that the cause of the Comrades was lost and she could do no better than to accept his love.

He decided that the girl could be kept in the cantonment of the Under City where he ruled the guard. And scarcely had he made the decision before chance took the matter out of his hands.

They had reached the Towerman's Road, threading their way through the ruins along

a path known as "the canal," a title that traced its origin to an old street name of the New York before the Great Catastrophe. As they turned into the broader way they met a brilliant cavalcade of Tower People, at their head Alda, Frederick, and Wolff.

Fortune would have given his captain's rank to have avoided this!

His frantic hope of passing unnoticed failed miserably. The voice of the Towerman stopped them and Wolff rode close to gloat over the fair prisoner.

Alda, watching from a little farther off, showed traces of emotion. The High-born was actually jealous of a girl of the Folk who had drawn Fortune from her side!

Frederick, close beside her, guessed Alda's secret and lost no time putting it to his advantage. The comptroller saw that the sooner this friendship between Wolff's daughter and the ambitious young captain was broken off, the sooner could he regain prestige.

"Ah, she is beautiful, eh? Very, very beautiful," Frederick remarked to his companion. "See how young Fortune looks at her—look, watch his eye! A pretty sight, two handsome young people—if the girl were of the Tower People who knows but there would be a match there? Well, well, I daresay she'll not look on him coldly, for all that!"

Alda made no reply, but her action spoke eloquently. She pushed her horse close to Wolff's and whispered to him. The Towerman nodded.

"Wenn," he called. The Commander saluted.

"Wenn, see that this woman is locked up in the stone prison where Zorn is. Gad, she's more dangerous than the man! Go yourself and see this done—I'll take no chance of a rescue. The girl must burn at the stake, along with that heretic, or our work would be but half done."

Wenn obeyed by taking personal command of Fortune's little company. The two parties separated and as they moved away Frederick rode close beside Alda, still poisoning her thoughts in the manner of which he was a master.

Watching the cold, hard face of the High-

born, the Red Fox regained some of the confidence he had recently lost. He saw a speedy end to Fortune's alliance with Alda.

Furious at this turn of events, yet helpless to change them, Fortune accompanied Mary to the stone prison of the Tower People. To reach it they left the Towerman's Road at a narrow street known by its ancient name, Wall.

They threaded a way among the débris, descending an abrupt little hill. At the foot of the hill was a squat, low building of gloomy, gray stone, designed with an attic roof and a noble porch supported by great stone columns, after some forgotten manner of architecture. This was the place where offenders of importance were kept—and none had been known to escape.

The old building had been in the ancient day one of the treasures of a great government. It was overshadowed by vast, crumbling walls of ancient structures which must once have towered into the clouds, but, unlike its mightier neighbors, this solid house of rock had survived the Great Catastrophe unharmed. It was as strong and as steady as the very foundation of Manhattan.

Up a wide flight of stairs, and under the dark porch Mary was led. Wenn himself stood by while she was ushered into a cell whose door was of solid steel; whose window was heavily barred.

Fortune lingered a moment in the doorway, eager to say or do some little thing that would reassure the woman he loved. Wenn, scowling at him, guessed from his drawn face something of the agony in Fortune's heart, and because this was the son of his old friend the grizzled commander gave them a moment together.

"Mary"—Fortune paused timidly—"Mary, will you try to believe that this—this is not my doing—that I tried to save you from this place—from death!"

Mary answered him with that same impersonal glance and tone she had used in the forest. "I am not afraid of this—nor afraid to die," she said calmly.

"But you'll not die, never! I swear that. I—I'll use my influence to stop it—Mary, have hope—"

"Do nothing. And I ask nothing!"

"Ah, but I must—because I love you, I—"

"Stop!" Mary's straightened figure quivered with her indignation. Her blue eyes flashed a bitter glance. Her hands were clenched into white fists.

"Love!" she exclaimed. "You still presume, you who betrayed the Folk! You traitor! Death by the flames I do not fear, but this—this insult—torture—have you no mercy on me?"

From that figure of wrath Fortune turned without a word. Blind to everything, he quit the prison. A messenger from Wenn at last overtook him in his swift, purposeless, mad walk, and Wenn's orders brought him back to duty.

Throughout a long day he worked mechanically, overseeing the return of hundreds of the Folk to their own cantonments.

The Under City was cold and idle. No forges blazed, no shuttles clacked, all industry had ceased. The miserable slaves of the Directorate clustered dully about their fires and faced the prospect of three days of starvation. They had ceased to hope about anything. They were apathetic, dumb, docile.

Their white faces and fearful glances crowded upon Fortune's misery. Everywhere he saw these cringing victims until the accumulation of their silent reproach almost maddened him.

It was past nightfall when he was free of duty. At once he went to Wolff's Tower.

Mary had forbade him to pity her or to aid her, but he was determined, nevertheless. Not to intervene for her would make him no better than her murderer. He sought Alda.

Though this was the day of her triumph the High-born was in a black mood. She could not forget the beauty of this girl of the Folk whom even the comptroller praised openly. Nor could she forget the insinuations Frederick had poured in her ear—insinuations designed to make her doubt Fortune.

If she did not love Fortune, at least Alda found a delicious flattery in his attention, his loyalty, his deference. And he was undoubtedly useful to her. But she was determined that the young man needed a lesson,

She greeted him coolly.

Fortune went after his desire without waste of time. His fair skin was flushed and his gray eyes sparkled hopefully as he began: "I come to see you about Mary, that girl who was taken in the raid—"

"Yes?" Alda's calculated sweetness at another time might have warned him off.

"Yes, I—I—she—" Fortune ran his fingers through his blond hair until it stood awry. He was at loss just how to put the matter, but desperate. "I want you to do something for her," he blurted. "To help her—"

"Yes?"

"You can see for yourself she is no ordinary woman," he hurried on tactlessly. "She is not a common girl. I—I never saw another like her—"

"Yes?" Alda purred for the third time. A trace of angry color was staining her white cheeks, and her black eyes were hard.

"It is not right that she should suffer," Fortune insisted, growing eloquent. "She must not suffer! With the others do as you please, but this girl—we must find a way to save her."

"We must find a way!" The High-born's exclamation was so unexpectedly bitter that it stopped the young man. It set him thinking.

"Surely," he began, "you will help me?"

"Why should I, my dear friend?"

"Why—well—well—because you—you are my friend, or so I have counted you. Or, if you want me to put it that way, out of gratitude. I have helped you. Yes, make it a bargain, then, do this in repayment for what I have done, and I'll be content. I will! I'll ask no more—"

"No more! You'll ask no more!" There was a savage sarcasm in Alda's exclamation, enough to warn any man.

Still Fortune missed her meaning.

"I promise it," he declared solemnly.

"Do this for me, and I'll be satisfied; only this little thing—"

"*This little thing*," Alda remarked. She sat up very erect among her cushions and her imperial gesture halted his words. "Listen," she bade coldly, "listen to what I say. The girl shall die. She is a rebel, and she must die, die at the stake. I'll

make it my own business to see that she burns. You can understand that, eh? *I'll see her burned!*"

Fortune shrank before the bitter hatred that blazed from her eyes. He was overwhelmed with astonishment, speechless, frozen with horror.

"You ask me this, *this* in repayment of a debt!" Alda hurried on hotly. "You have helped me, I do not deny that, but in repayment you ask merely that I annul all I've gained by your aid, give it back to you because of a girl, a common woman of the Folk—a pretty-faced thing that takes your fancy—a—"

"That will be enough." Fortune had risen from the low seat he had drawn close to her divan. Towering above her, he repaid her angry glance with such a blaze of indignation that Alda drew back, secretly alarmed.

Fortune spoke slowly, in a low tone, making an obvious effort to control his passion:

"I have heard of the gratitude of the High-born," he began. "It is a proverb. I should not be surprised. You will not help her; so be it! But, mark you, if you dare say a word more about her in my hearing, if you dare hint one nasty lie, I—I'll kill you. Yes, even you!"

As if to prove the sincerity of these words his clenched fists seemed to stretch involuntarily to seize her. His white face and wild eye spelled murder.

For a moment Alda cowered, 'tasting a terrible fear.

Then, without a word, Fortune wheeled about and burst wildly from her apartment.

From Wolff's Tower he hurried into the night without objective or even coherent thought. He went on foot, in a blind, purposeless hurry. Those who crossed his path were roughly hurled aside regardless of their rank.

So this was the gratitude of the mighty! Thus was he repaid for making Alda great!

Never did it enter his head that Alda was a woman, that Alda might be jealous of his attentions to another.

He realized only that his own act had put the woman he loved in peril of her life, and that the one person whom he

had confidently expected to help her had refused his plea.

He was beyond thinking. He could only feel, so he walked blindly, in an agony.

The hours passed, and still he wandered. The night was warm and fragrant with a splendid moon. He could not have said whether this was night or day.

With bowed head he was walking slowly down a wide and empty vista of ruined avenue. The clear moon stretched his shadow before him like a carpet for his feet. The old walls turned a thousand blind eyes upon him. Body and soul, he was in harmony with this desolation.

Something brought him to a stop, listening.

He heard it again—a thin, eery wailing, muffled, but growing closer. Its high pitch told of a terror unspeakable.

The sound seemed to come somewhere from within a crumbling heap of old walls that stood in his path. Halted and immovable, he listened until his eye saw something detach itself from the shadow and come running toward him, a stooped, wild figure that clasped in its arms a heavy burden.

He recognized that this was a man and as the man approached the moonlight revealed a face that had taken an awful greenish tinge.

With a thrill, Fortune knew the man. That mask of terror that turned toward him was the face of Solf, the weaver.

Terrified by Fortune's threat, but even more greatly moved by the proffered bribe, the weaver had gone over to the cause of the Tower People body and soul. He had served them with eager cunning, giving in detail every plan of the Comrades that he understood, and personally pointing out entrances to the secret tunnels of the Under City.

While he served he was well cared for, with two soldiers detailed to keep him from harm. It was only after that black dawn that saw a definite end to revolt that Solf discovered his hosts had lost interest in him. Without ceremony he was kicked from the Great Hall where Wenn had kept him. He started forth, the heavy bag that

contained his bribe clasped in his arms. When he passed the guard at the arched way the weaver hugged the bag tight against his breast and glanced fearfully at the lounging soldiers. One of them started toward him with a shout and he dodged away like a rabbit.

It was his intention for the present to find some hiding-place by himself in the forest, but to do that he must pass along numerous frequented streets. Within a short distance he was stopped by several of the police guard and made to answer questions. When finally they released him he fell foul of another soldier, a half-drunk man of powerful build who laid hold of him and discovering Solf's mysterious burden, demanded to know its contents.

In vain the weaver protested. His captor flourished a knife and was for despatching him on the spot. By a ruse Solf escaped and started to run, the drunkard in pursuit. He made directly for the Great Hall and threw himself on the protection of the guard.

"Let me to the Under City," he begged, "only let me back there."

Kicked and cuffed along a gantlet of soldiers who despised him, unrebuked, by the captain in command, though none dared rob him, the weaver was thrust finally into his own cantonment.

The place was dark and idle with a terrible stillness. About a smoldering fire in the center of their large platform a number of his fellows huddled.

Solf gave thanks to his gods and kept to the shadows. Slinking from spot to spot, he finally gained his own lair under the arch and sank down breathless among his rags. The sack of coin he covered hastily and stretched himself out to sleep.

Late in the day one of his fellows stumbled on him. Solf waked with a gasp of fright as the other shook him. With a bound he whirled toward the corner where his sack was hidden and patted anxiously among the rags until he felt its bulk.

"Eh, Solf," whispered the visitor, "we've missed you. You've been gone—where?"

"Never mind," snarled Solf. "That's my affair."

"Oh, it is! Well, no man saw you at

the great meeting, either—perhaps you know what happened there?"

"I—I have heard," muttered the traitor.

"Yet you weren't there?"

"I didn't say that, I—oh, plague, go about your business and don't bother me. I'm sick and sore."

"You look it. What have you under there? You've stolen some wine, I know. Come, Solf, share it with me, or I'll tell the others and they'll take it from you."

"No, no, no!" chattered Solf. "No, there is no wine. Nothing at all, only—no, nothing at all."

"Yes? You say so? Let me feel, ah—"

"No, damn you; no, no!"

Their hands grappled. Their bodies swayed close together as they scuffled, panting and whispering fiercely.

Solf's opponent stopped suddenly, surprised. "I heard," he whispered slowly, "I heard something—that—jingles—*like money!*"

"It is not money," Solf snapped.

"It sounded very like it. Let's see—"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"Get back, damn you! I—I'll shout for the guard."

The inquisitive one seemed impressed by this threat. He started away, but as he went he leveled a long, significant look at the quaking traitor.

"You'll wish yet that you'd been more generous with a friend," he whispered savagely.

Solf saw him rejoin the group at the fire. Among them a buzzing began. Now and then one looked toward Solf's corner.

The wretched weaver, nodding involuntarily from fatigue, forced himself to keep a sharp lookout on all sides. He guessed what their whispering portended.

CHAPTER XIV.

JUDAS.

FOR long hours Solf lay quaking among his rags.

A silent duel went on in the cantonment, the weavers about the fire, whispering and planning, watching Solf with catlike eager-

ness; the wretched traitor returning their stares, defying them by his sleeplessness to attempt to rob him.

Solf had had no sleep since his taking from the cantonment. In his service of treachery he had worked with a feverish zeal that had exhausted him. Inevitably, nature would conquer his will. He knew the time was close when he must surrender to fatigue.

But the watchers would not tire. There were always fresh ones among them to keep an eye on their prospective victim, and they saw that the fire was kept blazing.

Not even the most acute terror can eventually conquer exhaustion. Solf's brain grew dull. For a moment at a time his eyes would close in spite of all he could do. He would surrender himself to the delicious numbness of sleep to waken in a few seconds with a fearful startling.

And each time he wakened he saw the bright eyes of his companions watching him—waiting with inexhaustible patience for the moment when he would succumb.

Finally there came the time when his doze lasted not one minute, but several. His stiff body relaxed completely, and his consciousness strayed to some heavenly place of forgetfulness that is not of this world. He drew long, peaceful breaths, and his muscles, like his will, became as water.

From this happy state which was more alluring to him than any earthly happiness some corner of his mind that watched like a faithful dog waked him abruptly. His quick ears caught the faint scuff-scuff of bodies drawing nearer. His eyes opened. The fire had burned lower, but he could see dark, blurred forms of men, crawling slowly upon him.

Instantly he had seized the hidden bag of money and was on his feet. From his throat came a shrill yell of fright that served for the moment to halt pursuit. Fearful of interference by the police guard, the men who plotted to rob Solf of whatever it was he guarded so jealously lay still in the shadows and saw him vanish from the platform.

Hugging his spoils to him, Solf ran blindly into the first tunnel opening that offered. He knew the place well. Not far from his

own cantonment a great fall of rubbish blocked a little hole that gave on one of the old, blind tunnels supposedly walled off.

At this spot Solf crouched, listening. He heard the noise of men moving stealthily, drawing closer to him. The weavers, finding the guard had paid no attention to Solf's yell, had taken up the chase.

Solf scrambled painfully over the heaped-up stone and rubbish. He wriggled into the small opening, and, losing his footing in the blackness, stumbled and fell some little distance to the floor of the old bore.

As he felt the sack was dislodged from his grasp.

Bruised and shaken, he was on his feet without any loss of time, groping painfully among the old stones. At length his hand touched the familiar canvas. With the burden safe in his arms he started away at a stumbling, uncertain run.

When desperate men of the Folk ventured into these old tunnels of the ancient subways, they went with infinite caution, even though they knew the road. The windings of the system were bewildering to the most experienced, and branching tunnels and crossing ways made of them a labyrinth that no man of that day fully understood.

Solf had no practical knowledge of these holes. He was a weaver, his work had been comparatively easy; he had never had occasion to explore the underground mysteries of Maphattan.

And his mind, crazed by fear, kept hearing the noise of pursuit.

For as long as he could he ran, ran with a strength that comes only to the mentally unbalanced. Long after that he maintained a rapid, stumbling walk.

He had no light, nor means of making one. Often he fell, cutting his face and hands, bruising his body. Several times he floundered through deep, black water. Once he found himself in a pocket of poisonous air that barred his way as effectually as a stone wall. Often his feet escaped deeper pits in the decayed galleries only by some miracle.

At length came the time when it seemed he could go no farther. Exhaustion halted

him with swaying knees. Some semblance of reason returned, and he knew now that he had lost all sense of direction and purpose.

He became aware that he was whimpering brokenly, and tried in vain to stop the noise—to regain some self-control.

All about him was a velvet blackness without form. The air was cold and smarted his lungs and nostrils. His feet were in icy water, and a trickle of water from above wetted his body. The money he carried in his arms had become an intolerable burden.

Without the slightest warning of sound something that possessed a quick, uncanny strength of limb seized his leg from behind. He felt the prick of sharp claws and a furry body swarmed up his back, reached his shoulder, clawed at his long hair. Sharp teeth fastened in the flesh of his neck and wakened an intolerable pain.

Yelling fearfully, he spun round, his right hand groping over his shoulder until the fingers encountered a large, furry body. The claws fastened in the flesh of his hand and blood flowed.

What animal it was had attacked him he had but the dimmest notion. The old ways harbored various wild things of the forests, and enormous gray rats and tribes of outcast cats that had bred for countless generations in these holes.

At last his superior strength dislodged the thing and he hurled it from him. Still shouting until the old tunnel rang with his noise, he ran again—and found a sifting of bright moonlight above his head.

A pile of débris where the old pavement had dropped into the tunnel gave him a means of escape. He burst from that underground place of horrors and came again into the sweet, warm air, running with hysterical joy toward a fellow man.

He would have welcomed the dread executioner himself at that moment.

Fortune drew back with instinctive repugnance from the thing that grovelled prostrate at his feet, moaning words that were only half intelligible. His impulse was to turn away from this abject terror as he would avoid some loathsome decay.

"What is it?" he asked impatiently,

"What do you want with me. Get away—farther off, you hear!"

Out of Solf's whimpering he began to understand articulate fragments: "High-born, in the name of mercy! Can't you pity—me—pity me—"

"Well, well, what d'you want? Come, out with it!"

"Let me stay by you—a moment, but a moment, illustrious! Only guard me a few seconds—so they can't find me—give me some corner to lie in. Help me—"

"Who can't find you?" Fortune questioned. "Will you speak!" he cried impatiently, pushing the prostrate man with his foot. "Speak. There is nobody about."

"But they are near—they are near! Unless the great one shields me I—I—they will come. Only help a miserable man to hide himself."

"Will you tell me?" Fortune exclaimed impatiently. "Who is following you—why? Speak out, Solf."

The weaver looked up with a gasp of surprise. "You know my name—"

"Certainly, I know. You are Solf the weaver, the man who—"

"Ah-h! Now I know you—it was you gave me this money—you who ordered the soldiers to nail me to the great door unless—unless—" He stopped with a violent shudder.

"Tell your story," Fortune repeated sternly.

From Solf's disjointed recital gradually he gathered the essential facts. This abject thing in human form that clasped his ankles and grovelled irritated him mightily. He kicked himself free.

"Be on your way," he ordered. "Be on your way. You're a traitor to your own Folk. You deserve what you are suffering. I can do nothing."

He freed himself of the weaver's tenacious grasp and moved aside.

Solf raised himself to a sitting posture. The moonlight fell on his pallid, blood-streaked face and glittered in his rolling eyes.

He lifted a shaking fist and shook it in impotent rage. "A traitor am I?" he shrilled. "A traitor! Who made me a traitor? Who threatened to torture me unless

I played the traitor? Yes, let me suffer—let me pay. You—you can go your way, safe! But am I worse than you?"

Fortune shrugged indifferently at this tirade and walked on, the weaver's rasping abuse trailing behind. But one phrase had struck home and soon it halted him.

"Am I worse than you?"

If the young captain had faults they were the faults of youth and ambition. He also had virtues, and one of them was an ability to see beneath the surface of affairs. Another was innate honesty.

Was he much better than the weaver, after all? That was the problem that halted him.

Solf was a traitor. He had betrayed his comrades for a bribe, but the alternative had been torture. Who had offered him a choice of these but Fortune himself? Who had been clever enough to recognize Solf's weakness and play on it?

A morbid thought fascinated him: Was he so greatly different than this traitor of the Folk?

He, too, had betrayed the Comrades, and his bribe was the promise of power and advancement.

Wiser than Solf, he had succeeded.

Yet had he succeeded? The weaver had brought misery to his own kind; Fortune had brought misery to the woman he loved.

With that breadth of vision sometimes born of grief he looked back on what he had done and counted the cost of ambition. Desiring Mary, intent on taking her by force, he had brought Ham to his death. Desiring power, he had bargained with Alda and betrayed not only the Folk—with the Folk as yet he had little real sympathy—but Mary as well.

If she died in the flames it would be his hand, guided by ruthless desire, that kindled the pyre at her feet.

Now he understood with a terrible clarity. He saw himself as low as the wretched fugitive of the tunnels.

Realization made him physically sick. He swayed dizzily, and spying an old rubbish heap felt his way toward it and sat, a huddled figure of misery little better off than the man he had just left.

From this understanding sprang a pity for the weaver, his fellow in suffering. Even to think of Solf made him shudder with repugnance, yet with all the force that had driven him toward his own ambitious plans, Fortune rose unsteadily and turned about.

The young captain had fallen from a tremendous height when he walked back to aid the soiled thing that had wakened his conscience.

Solf was gone from the roadway. Fortune walked among the heaps of rubbish calling his name. He ventured between walls that threatened to drop their crushing weight of crumbled masonry upon him, calling and listening.

The sound of a stealthy progress was his answer. He called again: "Solf, Solf! Come here, you fool, come here—I'm not going to hurt you! Come to me."

Something in the tone, some promise of good intention, brought the weaver back into the moonlight. Fortune addressed him brusquely.

"You had best get into the forests, into some old ruin where men cannot find you, and stay there for the present. Come with me, if you think that best. I'll see you safe to some decent hiding-place."

The weaver hesitated a long time, his natural suspicion and terror of the soldier making him cautious. Only the fact that he was desperate moved him finally to accept this help.

They went slowly along the ruined street, a curious pair. Perhaps that moon that smiled so broadly on Manhattan, in all its years of life, had seen nothing queerer.

Fortune carried the bag of coin, Solf's blood-money. The weaver hobbled painfully at his side, shivering and gasping incoherently.

Once they halted at Fortune's volition.

"Stop that shivering, will you!" the soldier grumbled. "Damn the man, what a mess you're in! Here, take my cloak—yes, wear it! Anything to stop that chatter!"

It was several hours later, so slow was their progress, that they reached the edge of one of those frequent jungles that hid so much of the old city. There a man might hide for years if he chose.

In the shadow of its trees Fortune hand-

ed back to the traitor his sack of gold. Solf snatched at it eagerly, saying never a word. Still wearing Fortune's cloak, he stumbled on among the vines and disappeared.

Fortune never saw him again. But to his dying day he never forgot him.

Nor did he ever forget that night. He had seen things and heard things that loosed a flood of thought destined to change the course of his life, not in an hour nor a day—that would be rare, indeed—but as surely as the granite cliff turns aside the irresistible power of a swift stream.

He continued to wander among ruins until morning, without consciousness of time or place. Never before had he thought so long or so hard, nor seen himself and things about him so clearly.

CHAPTER XV.

"I SAY NO!"

THE day came when Wolff, the Towerman, sat in justice in the Great Hall. With him sat his daughter. Alda.

It was a proud day for the house of Wolff. The Towerman's effective handling of incipient revolution had won over the majority of the Directorate. Wolff pressed his advantage at the right moment and as a result his daughter has been confirmed as his legal successor in office.

There remained only to sentence the two heretics, Zorn and Mary, to the punishment Wolff had promised them. That was the occasion of this mockery the Tower People termed a trial by law.

Something of the form of the laws of the ancients had survived the Great Catastrophe, but it was form without life. The original honest intent of a government of the people which granted to every man the right to trial by his peers was gone. There remained only empty names and rites that made a bitter mockery of tyrannical intention.

Zorn was condemned before he appeared in that court of justice presided over by the Towerman!

The recluse and Mary, under heavy guard, were taken from their cells in the old stone prison. When they descended

the broad steps from the columned porch a curious little incident occurred.

In the center of this flight of stone stairs, now ruinous and littered with vines and weeds, there was a great, square rock, the pedestal of an old monument. The statue that once stood there was gone long ago, but cut deep in the base, in the ancient, printed letters, was an inscription. This told that here the first father of his country had taken an oath to serve the Folk of his day as their ruler after he had helped them to win their freedom.

Passing this memorial—a fragment of which probably all but a half-dozen of the dwellers on the site of old New York were ignorant—Zorn and Mary stopped and bowed their heads in silent homage. The soldiers about them stared curiously.

They saw nothing but a time-worn pedestal of squared stone and an inscription that no man could read. But Zorn's knowledge restored to that empty place the benign figure of the founder of a nation.

In spirit the second father of freedom and the woman whom he had inspired communed with his illustrious predecessor—Washington.

Then they passed on along old Wall Street and the Broad Way to the Great Hall where the Towerman waited to publish his revenge upon them.

Wolff and Alda occupied chairs of state at one end of a noble room in the building.

Enveloped in a gorgeous robe of golden sheen, the ruler of Manhattan still failed to fill the eye with the majestic picture the name of Justice inspires. Far more striking was the green-robed Alda, with her dead-white face, red lips, and blazing, black eyes. Her mouth was drawn into a hard line; the look in her eyes was cruel.

If Wolff in his gorgeousness represented Justice, the figure of Vengeance that sat on his right was far more compelling.

Below the great Towerman, and a step removed from the common floor, was the platform that included a witness stand and a long table, about which were seated Stone, Director of Laws, a little man in black robe and huge, ridiculous white wig, and numerous black-robed assistants. Stone's rôle was that of inquisitor for the government,

To the right of this table was a barred enclosure, the prisoners' cage. Four huge soldiers with swords drawn stood about it keeping their pompous and quite unnecessary attention on Zorn and Mary. Throughout the long trial the prisoners remained standing.

Zorn was quite at ease, calm, unmoved, giving a careful attention to all that passed. At times an observant person might have noted that the recluse appeared slightly contemptuous of and amused by the proceedings.

For that matter any person with a grim sense of humor could have found amusement in the lengthy and elaborate farce.

Mary, in her gray robe, was close at his side, her figure held tense, youthful defiance in the glance of her bright eyes. Her impatience was more manifest; her scorn more easily read. Not even Zorn's frequent whispered philosophy could quiet her youthful tenseness.

The hall was brilliant with the costumes of the Tower People. All of the High-born were present and in holiday array. There were numerous women in the audience, attracted by the spectacle of a woman about to be burned at the stake. For them this was a gala occasion.

The audience was exclusively of the Tower People with one curious exception. A small corner had been railed off and guarded like the prisoners' cage. Here the Folk were represented, in compliance with an ancient law of Manhattan. There was a man from each cantonment. Technically an audience they were no better off than unwilling prisoners.

Like rebellious children they had been brought there to witness the punishment give a man who dared defy their rulers.

The farce that the Tower People called justice was nearing its climax. Stone, the director, was summing up his case. The witnesses had been heard.

Of these witnesses but one had been examined on behalf of the prisoner. He was an unhappy member of the Comrades who had been taken in the raid. Bewildered, interrupted, bulldozed, he had stammered an incoherent account of the brotherhood of the isle and the plans to regain freedom.

He had cut a sorry enough figure, but who can say he was not heroic! At least, he had ended by affirming his loyalty to the Torch and his belief that freedom was the rightful property of all men, regardless of degree.

Fortune had been called to that witness stand. To the evident surprise of all the High-born the young captain was a most reluctant narrator.

Excessively pale, his blue-eyes ringed with dark circles that told of mental strain and sleeplessness since that night, four days ago, when he had met Solf, he answered only direct questions and in the briefest possible manner. It needed all of Stone's patience and skill to extract from him details of his visit to the Isle of the Great Woman and what he learned while there.

Fortune dared not meet the gaze of Mary, yet a terrible fascination kept his eyes hovering constantly toward the girl his narrative condemned to terrible torture.

He stammered his answers in a voice scarcely audible. He evaded Stone's probing; when he dared he lied boldly.

His white face glistened with an awful, cold sweat. One would have supposed him the shrinking wretch condemned to torture and these prisoners who looked on his judges.

There was at least one spectator who extracted the fullest enjoyment from this drama. That was Alda. Her hard eyes glittered with a cruel excitement. Her lips parted in a cold, snarling smile. In her triumph Alda gloated.

Dismissed finally, Fortune stood wearily not far from the Towerman himself, among a little group of officers. He stared, unseeing, across the great room. His thoughts were incoherent and bitter. Most of all, he was conscious of a growing rebellion against the proceedings.

Fortune knew thoroughly how colossal a fraud was this thing they called a trial. From Wenn, standing close beside him, he had learned the intention of Wolff and the Directorate to punish Zorn and Mary by torture.

Mentally and spiritually Fortune had lived through a terrible four days, during which he had gone about his military duty

with a mechanical attention to detail. He had learned to despise himself without finding any means of atonement—no hope of restoring his self-respect. Every day he had witnessed in a hundred forms the suffering his act had brought to the Folk of Manhattan.

And now the climax of suffering—he had spoken words that condemned the girl he loved to die by burning!

Only by losing her without hope of restoration did he learn how overwhelming was his love for her.

As far as possible he had avoided Alda and all the rest of his old world. But Alda, watching his white face, smiled secretly. She was perfectly certain why he was miserable and quite pleased to have caused his misery. Eventually she expected his return to her, very much chastened in spirit.

At last Stone's harangue ended. The Great Towerman sat silent a little time, plucking at his beard and giving all the outward signs of a man pondering a problem. Then he rose and all who were seated rose, too, as a mark of respect.

"This prisoner Zorn has acted in direct defiance of the law of Manhattan," Wolff began. "The evidence in proof of that is overwhelming. I am satisfied of his guilt."

There was a general silent nodding of heads in approval.

"The crime of inciting rebellion against Tower rule is the most heinous in our catalogue," the Towerman proceeded. "Zorn, fitting punishment for you is beyond the ingenuity of this court. But we will endeavor to do our best—the honor of Manhattan requires it.

"For your wickedness you shall suffer. You shall suffer all that the body can be made to suffer, not that we seek a personal satisfaction, or act in a spirit of petty revenge"—here Wolff's thin, crackling voice assumed an oily glibness—"no, not in that mean spirit, but in order that all rash men who dare plot as you have plotted may see and profit by the warning.

"Zorn, I sentence you to die by burning."

Wolff directed a malevolent glance at the prisoner. The recluse merely bowed his head gravely, and the murmurous audience

noted that he showed no emotion at all. They were keenly disappointed.

"You shall burn at the stake," Wolff continued after a momentary pause in which he appeared to hope for some protest from his victim. "This shall be done thirty days from to-day, at sundown—and with you shall perish this young woman, who has also dared to raise her voice against our sacred Tower rule. You hear, girl? You shall perish!"

Mary met the Towerman's hard look with a defiant composure. There was a heightened color in her cheek; a brighter sparkle in her eye. Never had she appeared so beautiful as at this moment of mute defiance.

Among the spectators there was a murmur of admiration. Alda noted it and hated her victim.

Disappointed again that even the girl had given no sign of fear, Wolff concluded with the formal announcement: "This is the will of Wolff, the Towerman, head of the government of Manhattan. So shall perish all enemies of our rule. Is there any man who says no?"

From the soldiers and the Tower People there was a general chorus of approval. The miserable representatives of the Folk, herded under an ever watchful guard, said nothing at all.

Released from further formality, the Tower People began to stir. Men started to talk and a woman's laugh, a little shrill, drew curious eyes.

"I say no!"

This defiance came like a thunder-clap. It produced instantly a terrible stillness.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The entire roomful gaped stupidly at the young soldier who stood alone, facing the shrinking figure of the Towerman.

For long seconds after this astounding declaration Fortune remained silent and rigid. He appeared to be struck dumb by his own temerity.

Then words came to him.

"I say no!" he repeated hotly. "Your judgment is cruel—inhuman. This court is a mockery of men's sacred rights. You cannot legalize murder.

"You, who dare call yourself champion of the Folk, what do you know of them or their needs? What do you know of their suffering in the slavery you have condemned them to?"

"They sought only the freedom that is their ancient right—Towermen before you have acknowledged that right—promised to restore them to their own. This Zorn has done no more than point them toward what is theirs. By what right do you condemn him?"

"And this woman—an innocent woman—you dare send her to death by torture!"

Fortune leveled an accusing finger directly at the dumfounded Towerman. "You," he cried angrily, "you who sit in judgment—you, Wolff—I ask you who gave you leave to hold freemen in subjection—to murder the innocent!"

Until this second, so astonishing, had been the action of the soldier, not a person had moved. Now Wolff was seen to wave his free hand in a fluttering semblance of the usual imperial manner.

A dozen soldiers rushed forward. Fortune was surrounded, disarmed—a prisoner.

DEAR LITTLE VERSE

DEAR little verse, the careless eye
And heedless heart will pass thee by,
And never needst thou hope to be
To others as thou art to me.

For, lo! I know thy bliss and wo,
Thy shallows, depths, and boundless heights,
How thou wast wrought, patient and slow,
Through crucibles of sleepless nights.

Robert Loveman.



A Limited Acquaintance-ship

by Marc Edmund Jones

JANET clutched her traveling bag on the bench beside her, and a little, ecstatic thrill brought just the faintest touch of red to her cheeks.

"Oh, I like the looks of that man!" was her mental exclamation. Her eyes followed him through the door of the dingy waiting-room, out to the concourse where the trains departed.

"I bet—" this was unconsciously audible, and her voice rose in her enthusiasm "—I bet he was a wonderfully handsome baby!"

A colored woman in the adjacent seat caught the last of it and turned. Her smile, friendly and broad, was echoed on the face of a child she held. Each of the two seemed, if possible, of a truer ebony shade than the other. "Did yuh-all speak tuh me, miss?"

Janet shook her head, but brightened as she noticed the dusky youngster, leaning over to pinch its cheek. "You little darling!" she murmured. And to herself: "You're the image of the darky face I did week before last, and—" smiling "—got a lot of dollars for!"

One talent Janet Carruthers possessed in abundance; an odd sort of specialty, as though some wee chip of genius, sent a-flying into the cosmos while some master artist was being chiseled from star dust, had been caught by this ebon-haired, saucy-faced

girl, to be treasured and developed until it became a markedly deft faculty for putting babies' faces on paper with brush and water color.

Fat cheeks and wide eyes and tiny mouths they all had, but there was an uncanny something which made each one individual. Each, in a sense, was a portrait; yet each was indisputedly Jane Carr—a shortened form of her name, and a signature which preserved the secret of her real identity.

Modest, her head remained unturned by the growing demand for her babies. A true artist, she never ceased scanning faces of the people who passed or came near her. Thus she had caught the intangible thing in the expression of the man who unconsciously had thrilled her. Thus she was delighted with the curves and softness in the features of the little negro child beside her.

Suddenly she started with the guilty realization that she had forgotten, for the moment, her own charge. She was here, in Chicago's ill-designed Dearborn Station, fifty minutes before train time, ready to leave for Los Angeles on the Santa Fé California Limited with her sister's only child, Helen Hunt Brewster, who aged seven exactly, had come all the way from Michigan in the sole care of the train crew to join her.

Claire, two years older than Janet, had

remarried in Los Angeles, and well. The trip, to take the child to her new home, was Janet's vacation from her daytime job—a prosaic one of bookkeeper—and her first trip away from the environs of the lake metropolis. The younger sister, now that the moment of departure was near, was as excited as the child—but where was Helen?

With all of the dignity of her septet of years placed plumb upon their own responsibility, the little lady in question emerged triumphantly from the lady's wash-room. Then she forgot her importance and rushed to Janet, clambering into her lap.

"Aunty!" She was breathless, and her eyes shining. "The maid got me a box to stand on, and I washed my own hands and face and—" the supreme test of competence, and an argument for future self-assertion—"I didn't forget my ears, but rubbed them hard, till they hurt!"

Janet laughed. "Your mother will be terribly proud of her Helen!"

"Mamma says I will be awfully happy, and that I'll like my new daddy, too!" The child, after her unbidden excursion, was ready for a confidential chat. "They have lots of pretty flowers in California, and the oranges are awfully big!" A pause for breath. "I'm going to pick them right off the trees in my new daddy's orchard—"

Janet stopped her suddenly. "Sh!"

The man whose passing, on his way out to the trains, had awakened her interest was now returning. More, after a survey of the room, he was coming straight for her. She noticed the swing of his walk, indicative of strength. The contour of his head and the lines of his features were clean. There was a subdued suggestion of humor in his expression.

"If only I knew him!" she thought. He seemed the very embodiment of her ideals; but of course there could be no introduction, and she would never see him again—!

All at once she clutched Helen closely to her. He had stopped directly in front of them, glancing at her inquiringly. Sure that he intended to speak, she tilted her nose high and averted her face. She was not to be spoken to in public by a stranger without cause.

For a moment he hesitated; then he turned away. She caught a glimpse of his face, and saw he was puzzled. All at once she smiled, deciding he had mistaken her for someone else at first glance. Yet—it would have been nice if he had spoken! Again she wished she could know him, and again her eyes followed him as he walked out to the train shed.

Little Helen observed the incident closely. She straightened in Janet's lap and pulled at the lace of her waist to attract her attention.

"Aunty!" A more insistent tug brought Janet to a recollection of present things. "Aunty! He wanted to say something to you!"

"No, dear!" laughing. "He thought I was someone else!"

"But—" the little face puckered into a frown—"he looked right at you, and he would have said something, 'cept you made a face, and—" with a flash of the prescience of childhood—"you wanted him to say something, 'cause you kept looking after him!"

As logic it was irresistible. Janet laughed. "Nice ladies," she explained, "don't speak to strange men in public, or let men they don't know ever speak to them without an introduction!"

"What's—what's an introduction?"

"Well—" grasping for an illustration—"if I didn't know you, and someone else knew you and knew me, and this someone else said to me: 'This is Miss Helen Hunt Brewster!' and said to you: 'I want you to meet Miss Janet Carruthers!' why—that would be an introduction!"

"Oh!" expression clearing. "Then, if somebody knows you, and him—!"

"But nobody does, honey, so let's not worry about it!"

Rising, she took her bags, one in each hand. Helen, with a tiny suitcase all her own, preempted a little finger for guidance, and they went out to the train, now ready to receive its passengers.

Chicago has achieved its supremacy as a railroad center at the cost of much that might have been beautiful and attractive. From the stations at Twelfth, at Dearborn, at Harrison, at LaSalle, and at Adams

Streets more than a dozen of the country's biggest lines weave their tenuous way in and out through the South side, branching into huge yards belching with soft coal smoke, or preserving a dignified orderliness through some well-kept residential section, until they fan to the east around the bottom of Lake Michigan, or bend to the west, as in the case of the Santa Fé.

The South branch of the Chicago River is lined with elevators and factories, flanked by limitless sidings. The streets are interminable tunnels or endless viaducts. Everywhere are tracks and cars and smoke—the background of the city's wealth.

So when the Limited got under way at last, diving under Clark Street and bending sharply into place between the rights of way of two rival systems, Janet was glad of the seclusion of her compartment, away from the dirt. She had been afraid to chance supper before taking the train. On the diner they would use up much of the hour before bedtime, missing none of the scenery.

Helen developed a supreme disregard for the menu. "I want hot tea biscuits and grape jelly, and—and hot cocoa!" She glanced at the darky waiter triumphantly.

"I doan know, missie—" rubbing a forefinger behind his ear thoughtfully, and looking to Janet for confirmation. "I'll ask th' steward!"

"—And ice cream!" added the child.

Hot biscuits were not forthcoming, or obtainable; nor grape jelly. Fried chicken was rejected scornfully, but a huge piece of apple pie proved acceptable, *à la mode*; and Helen had no trouble whatever in disposing of the whole big pot of steaming chocolate. Janet, watching with a rueful smile, congratulated herself on her foresight in bringing a bottle of pills.

Supper over, the child was ready for bed. The youthful aunt, not without a furtive thought or so of the man in the station, read a romance provided by the porter and sniffed at the heroine for deliberately maneuvering a meeting with a young chap whose appearance attracted her. It was past midnight, and the train was nearly out of Illinois when she clambered in beside the child, who was sleeping fitfully because of the sweets.

Morning, reversing the expected order of things, Janet woke first. During the night they had crossed the Mississippi at Fort Madison and had passed through the little bit of Iowa into Missouri. Propping herself up on her elbow, the city-bred girl revelled in the kaleidoscopic views of the rolling farm lands, of the barns and silos, inevitably red, of the cattle being driven out to pasture even this early, and of the hands taking their apparatus into the fields.

The sun, rising through and dissipating the mists, shone full into the compartment, cheering, and as yet without heat.

In the Art Institute, famous for its development of Chicago's artists, Janet had attended night class and had tried to widen her scope and find a taste for subjects beyond her baby faces. But until this morning on the train she had failed utterly to understand the love for nature, the impelling urge which had taken her fellow pupils out into the country for their week-ends.

The beauty of the emerging day entranced her. She wished she might have had her pad and her Windsor-Newtons right there with her; and she longed to paint just as she was, reclining in her night-dress in the glow of the dawn.

Helen awoke with a sudden start. "Oh, Auntie!" she exclaimed, as she oriented herself to a waking state, "I dreamed that that man in the station took you off somewhere and left me all alone, and then I was awfully frightened and—I woke up!"

Janet slipped an arm about her. "You see, Helen, you mustn't eat so much sweet stuff! All dessert and no meat makes Jack dream dreams!"

"I—" somewhat impressed—"I'll eat just what you say for breakfast!"

Laughing, Janet looked at her wrist watch. Then she kicked the covers from them playfully and rose to a sitting position. "We must hurry!" she said. "We get in Kansas City at eight and stay for an hour, and we can walk around the depot, and stretch our legs, and—"

"—And maybe see the man again!" supplied Helen innocently.

"Nonsense!" Janet smothered the child under a pillow, in fun, but there was a suspicious bit of color in her face.

As a matter of fact the man was in the station, and Janet caught him looking at them. Undoubtedly he had come on the same train; perhaps might be going further in the direction they were. She flushed, uncomfortable in the knowledge that the sight of him should so affect her.

Helen, tugging at the coat of her suit, saved the situation.

"Aunty, I want an almond bar! Please!"

"But you just finished breakfast!"

"I know, Aunty!" the child dimpled, archly. "But I was good, and I didn't have a thing sweet!"

Kansas City is proud of the big new union depot, and in its huge and ample proportions Janet and the man should not have crossed paths again. But he was near as she stocked up with chocolate, and he seemed to be watching her as she fortified herself with magazines from another side of the stand.

Angry, not because of his proximity, but because her interest in him persisted in spite of herself, she led Helen out of the station for a ten or fifteen minute survey of the city. To her dismay the stranger, emerging from another door, made straight for her.

"Excuse me," he began, politely, lifting his hat, "I believe that we—"

Janet's head, at the first word, was up. "I don't know you!" she exclaimed, interrupting. And with a show of dignity to cover her confusion she took Helen's arm and hurried back into the depot. There she found the train ready again, and fled to the compartment.

The child, happy with her chocolate, left the girl to her thoughts. Janet, flushed still, was conscious of another discovery. She had heard him speak—and she liked his voice. A quiet mastery in its intonation had impressed her more than had his features in Chicago the night before.

"I wonder—" This was inaudible; her expression of her reflections within the confines of her own mind. "I wonder why girls can't meet men without formality and introductions and trouble; yet—he might not be nice or proper at all, and—" It was a problem no one worried brain could solve.

With her magazines she would have been content to spend the morning in the little room, but her companion, with the roaming proclivities of seven years, would never have rested under such restriction. First Helen promised not to leave the car, and Janet sat reading with the door open. Then the child discovered that the observation platform was only two cars back and nothing would do but that Janet should take her.

In the next sleeper Janet's heart nearly stopped, and she stood dead in the aisle with the sudden disconcerting recognition of the back of a man's head.

It was her man! To pass before a thousand on a Chicago street in a freak gown would be less hard than to continue down between the seats knowing he would see and watch her; would keep his eyes upon her as she swung around the drawing-room out of sight. Yet, Helen had preceded her and might turn to beckon at any moment.

It was an ordeal she had to face, and so she braced herself to it and hurried after the child. As she passed his section she did not look at him, but she did glance at his bag on the seat before him. On it were the initials: "R. K."

On the observation end a camp-chair and a stool were unoccupied. Behind the speeding train there unfolded a constantly changing panorama of the great agricultural section of Kansas, a state which it would take the entire day to traverse. In the heat of the morning it seemed cool on the platform, and Janet was glad that Helen had insisted upon their coming. A fear, held at first, that he would follow was forgotten, and both lost themselves in the fascination of watching the track and scenery melt into the distance.

"R.K." What could his name be? It would be next to impossible to guess the "K", but the "R" was Robert, or Roy, or Ralph, in all probability. Of course it might be Ronald, or Reginald—but Janet could not reconcile such a name with him. Once she had known a man named Ralston, but that was too uncommon.

Robert, it was, or Ralph. And she puckered her brow in an effort to discover her preference. She would like—she colored at the thought—to call him Bob.

Long before lunch time Helen was hungry and Janet was ready for the first call from the diner fully half an hour before it came. On a long trip there is little to do but eat, and read, and sleep; and the sheer inertia of it is apt to breed a remarkable appetite.

They returned through the man's car—"Bob's car!" thought Janet to herself—and he was not in sight, nor did he appear while they ate. Back in their own compartment, Helen announced that she was sleepy, and Janet fixed her comfortably on the seat. Then, suddenly acknowledging a distaste for reading, she yielded to the impulse flashing into her mind, and headed back for the observation end. She had never travelled before, and the morning spent there had so fascinated her that she was more than willing to brave the ordeal of passing the stranger again.

He was not in his seat, however, and soon she was ensconced in the chair she had previously occupied. Most of the passengers were in to lunch. She had the platform to herself.

Was his name Robert, as she hoped? Was there any legitimate way in which she could make his acquaintance? She watched the receding track and the dissolving views, but her thoughts went as naturally to him as though the introduction had already been effected; as though his interest in her had been demonstrated as real, and expressed as sincere.

Her solitude on this very tip-end of the long limited was quieting. The rhythmic hum of the steel-tired wheels on the heavy steel rails was a lullaby. She had eaten, and well. The scenery dimmed in her perception, and her reflections upon the stranger in the car behind made a subtle transition from thought to dream stuff. Janet slept.

Her awakening was to an amazing phenomenon. First conscious of a weight upon her shoulder, she attempted, in a half doze, to shift her position. Without the full strength of wakened consciousness it proved impossible, and she opened her eyes. Then she gasped.

A male passenger, seated in the camp chair next to hers, had fallen asleep also, and his head had worked over until it rested

upon her shoulder. Blinking, she took a second glance, and received the real thrill of her relatively short lifetime. It was "R.K." himself!

At first, as she gathered her faculties, she thought he was shamming. She reached up to move his head and something in his lack of response to the touch of her fingers told her that he was in real slumber and so oblivious of his position. Then she wondered whether she should wake him. Of course she ought to do so, but—she flushed as she realized the embarrassing nature of the situation.

Too, something in the warmth of his head, penetrating the simple gown she wore on the train, appealed to her. She had admired and studied heads as far back as she could remember. Latterly she had learned to paint them. True, she confined herself to infants; but a man asleep and helpless is little more than a babe, and for the moment she thought of him so.

A faint perfume from his hair found her nostrils. His cheek, freshly shaven, fitted perfectly into the curve of her neck. The evenness of his breathing caught her, and she noticed the lack of the odor of tobacco on his breath.

Realizing that there might be any number of people in the car behind grinning at the spectacle, knowing that the color was deeping in her face and travelling to her neck, she yet held still, hardly daring to breathe, and knowing she had not the will to wake him.

He stirred, however, and opened his eyes suddenly. Almost in an instant he realized what he had done. He blushed like some schoolboy caught in a particularly unboyish act, and for a moment stared at her in helpless confusion.

Finally he found his tongue. "I had no idea—" he began.

She rose, starting for the door into the car. There was a world of color in her own face still, but she was determined not to enter into any conversation with him, even after this absurd accident, without an introduction!

He jumped up and seized her arm, "Please wait, and—listen to me—"

She faced him, and he dropped his glance

before hers. She hurried on into the car and through to her own compartment. Helen woke and immediately wanted to know if it was supper time. Janet, laughing at the question, knew she was still flushed a bit and felt that the weight of a head rested on her shoulder yet.

At Dodge City the time went back an hour, to change from Central to Mountain time, and an hour was added to the afternoon. But dinner was started according to the standard of time by which the passengers had worked up their appetites, and there was no grumbling. Helen was ready for bed at the astonishing early hour of eight—by Janet's reset watch—and before the child was tucked in the train has crossed the state line into Colorado.

La Junta and Trinidad were passed in the night. Janet, again the first to awake, pulled up the shade and almost clapped her hands in her delight. Over a hundred miles into New Mexico, the entire complexion of the landscape had changed. Here were hills and mountains, and lights and shades of mist, and tints and colors which appealed to the artist in the girl until her impression of the previous dawn was entirely eclipsed.

Here were no plains of Kansas. In the darkness the limited had once climbed to a point seventy-five hundred feet above the sea, and Janet, when she woke, was still at an altitude of six thousand feet. There was an indescribable crispness in the air and it almost seemed to crackle as it came through the one opened window. Even the rising sun, just visible between two peaks, was clothed in a more glorious mantle than on the previous morning.

"Helen! Look!"

She roused her little niece gently, and together they watched the sunrise through the window, clinging to each other and keeping covered for warmth. To the both of them the mountains were a new and awe-inspiring spectacle.

Breakfast was in the same high altitude, the heavy train climbing slowly to another seventy-five hundred foot point before its drop into Albuquerque, only five thousand feet above sea level.

At that point, reached just before noon, there was an hour's stop, and Janet and

Helen had their first sight of the American Indian at his worst.

"Fine slippers! Me bead um, self! Dam cheap!"

The brave, disfigured with paint, and impossibly ugly to begin with, grinned at them, and Helen, trembling, clutched a no less nervous Janet in fright.

She, looking about, caught a glimpse of her stranger. It was the first time she had seen him since the episode on the back platform. Now, with an amused expression, he was approaching them, perhaps to be of assistance. She, with quickly uptilted head, forgot her fright and started off in the other direction with Helen.

The long platform, the grass plots between the tracks and station, the long cement approaches to that structure—a masterful bit of mission architecture set back far enough to be effective—even the building itself; all were literally infested with the Indians. Pottery, Navajo blankets, various sorts of beaded work, and any number of trinkets bought by the wholesale from Eastern factories were here offered to the tourists at exorbitant rates. Apples, fruit, candy—the traveller who said the Armenians were the best merchants on earth never met the Albuquerque redskins.

After the hour in New Mexico's sun the interior of the train was welcomed, and aunt and niece sat down to their lunch with the biggest appetite they had known yet.

"Do you suppose they have waffles?" inquired Helen, with an eye ever to the difficulty attainable. Then, with a sudden surprised start, she clutched at Janet's sleeve. "Aunt!" although a whisper, it could be heard the length of the car "It's your man, and he's sitting opposite!"

Janet looked up from the menu, startled. The stranger was smiling, as was everyone else who had heard Helen's whisper, and as his eyes met hers, there was nothing in his but a friendly, tolerating patience which said: "I'll meet you yet!" Her feet and hands were cold and the back of her neck was hot, but she forced herself to meet his gaze unflinchingly until he looked down, sobering suddenly, and showing his discomfort.

"There are no waffles, dear!" Janet said,

in an even voice. "But they have lamb chops, and sweet potatoes which I can fix for you with butter—"

Helen brightened. "And ice cream?"

Janet nodded. The waiter, approaching, turned to the man.

"Have you written the order, sir?"

Janet, flushing, pushed the pad toward him. "Here is our order!" she exclaimed, with emphasis. When the waiter had left she glanced at the stranger and caught him studying her amusedly. For just an instant she forgot herself.

"Did you have to sit at this particular table?" she inquired sharply.

"It was the only vacant seat," he replied. Then his eyes twinkled. "Thank you for speaking to me!" he added.

She gave him no further opening, however. The long afternoon saw the train mounting the other side of the basin. At supper time—they went in at first call—the train was again a full seven thousand feet above the sea, and about to cross the state line from New Mexico into Arizona. After supper, just as they were about to settle down in their compartment, the engine ground to a sudden stop, and some ten or fifteen minutes later the word came through that there was a wreck ahead and that they would be delayed for hours.

The sun was setting, but it would be light for a long while. Janet conceived the idea of walking ahead to see the wreck, if possible, and so she exacted a promise from Helen not to leave the car under any circumstances. Then she donned her hat, and the coat of her suit; jumping down to the rough stones of the ballasted roadbed, a full three feet, without thought of the lightness of her shoes. In a moment she knew she could not walk the track the length of the train, let alone go to the wreck.

They were stopped in a desolate spot. Behind them a long low wooden trestle bridged a sandy waste which probably attained the dignity of a stream in the rare rains of the winter season. Around were the lowlying tops of the mountains; to which they had nearly climbed. Save for a brown, scrubby growth at the edges of the sand, there were no growing things.

Her attention was attracted by a peculiar

formation of rock close to the railroad, and she walked over, her feet sinking in the fine, loose sand. A cañon some ten to twelve feet deep had been formed by erosion, revealing basalt of red and blue and deep purple, colors upon which the last rays of the sun glinted in attractive fashion.

Her mind upon the play of lights, she did not realize she had stepped close to the edge until the sand slipped under foot, or else the bank crumbled, precipitating her to the bottom, without hurt, upon her feet.

Laughing, she looked for a place to reascend, for it was only just deep enough to cut off her view of the train. Finding none, she started walking along the wall of rock, looking for a place where she could get a hand and toe hold.

Several times she attempted the ascent. Twice she slipped back. Once she fell, cutting her wrist and thigh on the sharp edges of the stone.

In her anxiety to get out of the depression she lost track of time and distance. Suddenly, in an almost perceptible deepening of the shadows, she realized night was falling. There came to her the first qualm of fright. Turning, she started to run back. Then she realized to do that was foolish. Setting her teeth, she started desperately to climb at the nearest spot which offered any hold. A second time she fell, and it seemed to her as if all hope was gone. They would not miss her. They would go on without her.

All at once she heard a sound. She scrambled to her feet. In the dusk she saw it was a man approaching, in the cañon. She rushed toward him, and with a gasp recognized her stranger. Now, however, there was no time for thought.

"How did you know?" she asked, clutching his arm and clinging to him.

He started back with her. "I saw you slip and watched. When you didn't show up—"

"You—you have been watching me a lot!" There was reproach in her tone, but such a measure of relief that it was overshadowed.

"Ever since Chicago!" he admitted.

"I'll never forgive you for it!" she affirmed. "You have no introduction to me,

and so have no right to take an interest in my affairs!" Nevertheless her clasp of his arm seemed to tighten a bit.

"I thought I would introduce myself, only you never gave me a chance!" His tone was whimsical.

"That wouldn't do!" she rejoined. "It's too easy!"

"And you'll never forgive me?"

"Never!"

"But suppose I hadn't been watching, and they'd gone on and left you here to spend a night alone out in these rocks—"

She shivered, and took hold of him with the other hand also. "If you hadn't come after me, ugh!" She laughed then. "I shall never forget you, now! Never!"

"And yet you won't forgive me?"

She considered. "Not unless you get a formal introduction!"

"And I can't talk to you on the train tomorrow, at all?"

"Of course not!" She wondered at her own firmness.

He strode on in silence, except that once he chuckled to himself. Finally he stopped at a place he had marked with a white handkerchief. "Up here!" he exclaimed. "And hurry! They're probably holding the train for us!"

He helped her up with ease, showing his strength. A moment, and he had clambered up also. The conductor, watch in hand, waved for them to hustle, and the Limited was under way the moment they were aboard. Janet, afraid to trust herself with him further, dashed for her compartment and found Helen waiting, already undressed and prepared for bed.

"I saw you, Aunt!" she exclaimed. "You were talking with him! Some one introduced you, didn't they?"

"No, honey!" Janet fanned herself. She was burning. "He saved my life, perhaps. I fell, and the train might have gone on without me!"

"If—" this was a new proposition. "If he saves your life, Aunt, he doesn't need an introduction, does he?"

"Uh—get into bed, honey, and don't bother me with questions!"

"But you like him, don't you, Aunt!"

For answer Janet pretended to smother

the child, and they laughed and romped together until Janet herself was ready for bed. In her heart the girl knew Helen was right. And of course she could not refuse to speak to him in the morning, after his service to her. How foolish she had been! He had not really tried to force an acquaintanceship on her!

Sleep came to the niece but not to the aunt. She was awake when the train, two hours late, passed over the Grand Cañon in the small hours of the morning. The scene was flooded with moonlight, but it would take more than the moon to illuminate the five thousand feet of the cañon's depth at that point. Something in the awe of nature's handiwork stilled her and she slipped off to sleep.

On the third day the child was the first to wake. It was near breakfast time, and they hurried, to learn that time had changed again in the night, from Mountain to Western standard, and the dinner was not quite ready. Janet set her watch back its second hour and wondered when she would see the man. The first thing she would ask would be his name, and it had to be Robert—Bob!

But during the whole of the long day he eluded her, respecting her wishes as expressed the night before, and she had not even seen him when the train pulled into the Los Angeles depot.

Clare was waiting with her husband, and the first words, after the rounds of hugs and kisses, were practical.

"Did you have dinner, or did you wait?"

"We waited!" Janet smiled. She was busy looking up and down the station. She could not let him go without a word.

"And I'm awfully hungry!" Helen contributed this without relinquishing a bit of her hold on her mother.

"All right! Come on!" The husband, determined to justify his possession of the family's pants led the way.

The little station was jammed with people. The train brought stars for the movies and movie struck individuals who hoped to find their opportunity in the half hundred of studios without consideration of the huge number of struggling unemployed already in the city. There were automobile and

manufacturing representatives, and prosperous-looking men concerned with the growing industrial life of southern California.

Wan Easterners, in search of health, stood out now and then in the crowd. Not the least of all were the tourists, who at one time constituted almost the sole means of support of the Los Angeles citizens. In all this *mêlée* there seemed to be no sign of Janet's stranger.

Suddenly Clare's husband, in the van, stopped with a shout. "Hey, Kenny! On the double!"

Janet, her attention caught intuitively, saw her man emerge from the press of people. He was grinning broadly, and the two men greeted each other in the unmistakable fashion of nothing short of college bed-fellows. She stole to the side of Clare, cheeks burning.

"This, Clare"—a typical male introduction—"is Bob Kenny, the finest man that ever played quarter-back to my right tackle at Yale!"

Then Janet was conscious of the fact that Clare's husband was looking from Bob to herself in puzzled fashion.

"Haven't you two—haven't you two met?" he inquired. He turned to Kenny. "My sister-in-law, Janet Carruthers, the 'Jane Carr' whose baby heads you admired so much, and"—to Janet—"Bob Kenny, who's come out to help me make my big business bigger!" In sudden exasperation he faced the man again. "Hang it, Bob, you must have received my wire, because you took the Limited a day later, and—"

Kenny laughed. "But you didn't wire Miss Carruthers, and she—"

"Only I did!" Turning to her: "Didn't you get my telegram, Janet, about being nice to my new partner on the way out?"

Slowly Janet began to comprehend. Mr. Kenny—Bob—had taken her train for the

very purpose of meeting her, and she had kept him at a distance all the way out because—

"I didn't get any telegram!" she exclaimed, coloring slowly.

The husband turned to the amused Kenny. "Couldn't you have shown her yours, then! Didn't you have nerve enough to speak to her? Wasn't the fact she had Helen with her enough to convince you it was Janet?"

Kenny slipped his hands in his pockets, "I always tear a telegram up when I read it, and she might have thought I was lying. Besides"—whimsically—"I tried to speak to her, but—talk of the North Pole, and glacial epochs, and ice in general—!"

Janet flushed again and drew him aside, "You shall take me up alone, just for saying that—Bob!" Her smile should have made up to him for all her previously discouraging frowns. "I was sorry for what I said last night, and I tried to see you all day to-day to tell you I was sorry!"

"It's all right!" His voice was soft, and his pressure on her arm gentle as he helped her into a taxi. "I could have forced you to listen to an explanation, but I had only three days to wait at the most, and I wasn't so sure but that you were right in not letting a stranger speak to you, and that you were just the kind of a girl I could—"

"Sh!" She put a hand over his mouth, "I'm going to be in Los Angeles for eight days, and"—trembling suddenly—"you mustn't use up all your conversational material at once!"

"It's your vacation, isn't it?" As before he respected her moods.

"Yes!" She looked at him inquiringly.

"But you don't have to go back to the job if you don't want to!" Again there was the mysterious quality in his voice.

Again she put her hand over his mouth.

THE KISS

A KISS is not like the poems at all
Which I drop through the editor's office door;
For I like it as well "returned with thanks,"
As "accepted, with a request for more."

Clinton Harcourt.

Yellow Soap

by Katharine Haviland Taylor

Author of "Cecilia of the Pink Roses."

CHAPTER XXV.

WARMTH.

"IF you'll hold on," he heard himself say, "I think I can get you in quite safely."

And then he picked her up. And when he did he set his teeth and thought what poor echoes dreams were of the real, and the touch-of-sun feel faded, leaving him wondering whether the earthquake came from inside, or whether there was a real one?

On the sand he stood still for the shortest second. "Thank you so *much!*" he heard in a very gentle, small voice, and then he put her down.

"It was nothing," he answered. Evidently she didn't know—didn't know, and he felt that he would have known her were he blind and had she not spoken a word.

She looked down at his feet. "I'm so sorry!" she said contritely, and then she laughed suddenly and looked at the trouble-causing book. "He was getting her!" she explained. Theodore smiled as she sobered. "How can I thank you?" she asked, once more entirely penitent.

"If you would sit down here and talk to me for ten minutes," said Theodore, "I would consider it the biggest thank-you I ever had." His voice faded as her face changed. "That was unfair," he said quickly, "of course you couldn't. I—I forgot and asked it because—because I know you and wanted to talk to you a little while—without you knowing me. Do you remember Delia Riggs? I am her son."

"Ever since I've grown up I've wanted

to see you," said Frances quickly, "so that I might thank you for your kindness to me that day I cried in the kitchen. I never forgot it! *You* will never know how it helped!" She put out her hands and he took them, tried to speak and failed.

"Can we sit down?" she questioned, adding: "But I forgot your wet clothes. We mustn't. You might take cold."

"Oh, no!" he broke in. "I won't. I never do! In fact I never have colds. I can't remember that I ever have colds, and especially not when I have wet feet. When I *do* get colds I never get colds from wet feet. In fact, I seldom catch cold, and—"

He stopped, for she was laughing at him and so frankly that he joined her. "Do you remember the Jockey Club?" she inquired. "You gave it to me with a speech built on those lines. It was so dear of you! Your giving me that really made my Christmas! You aren't changed—Hargraves."

She had hesitated for the faintest moment, before his name and she looked up after it, rather searchingly. What she found in his face evidently satisfied her, for she added: "I am glad to see you—so glad! What are you doing here?"

They sat down and he told her. The lumber lands and the vineyard interested her, but the pictures and their making took her breath away.

"I've seen them, of course," she said, "but I hadn't taken them seriously. You think that real actors will act real plays—silently? I can't believe it!"

"They aren't silent when they make them! You ought to hear them! Would you—would you care to visit the studios?"

*Copyright, 1920, by Katharine Haviland Taylor.

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"I'd love it! But of course they have to be silent when they're shown. I can't believe that really good actors and actresses will ever do it."

"There's a man in the East," said Theodore, "who's working out a phonograph attachment. That doesn't sound practical to me, but you'd be surprised how much of the spirit of a play may be caught by gesture and expression. I want you to come out. Is your sister here with you?"

"No, mother. She's been ill with pneumonia. She'll be happy to see you, too!"

"Thank you," answered Theodore. He poked a little hole in the sand with a very wet boot as his thoughts rose jubilantly. He was to see her again—again! He looked up to meet her eyes.

"I think," she said, "that you are just as nice as you used to be. You have the same, straightforward eyes."

"I've done lots of things that I'm ashamed to remember," he blurted out. "I had some hard years and I guess I wasn't equal to them."

"That's a very healthy sensation," she said, standing up. "I was so delighted to hear of your good fortune," she went on, changing the trend of the talk as they walked slowly down the beach. "Wasn't it a wonderful thing!"

"It was," he agreed. And then he told her how it had come, how he had needed it; how Charlie had had to have the interest of experimenting; how he, Hargraves, hadn't believed in the thing at first, but how faith had come. And he told her a great deal about himself, as they walked, through tales of other people.

"And this girl is now your leading actress?" asked Frances, with a little tug at her heart, which she did not understand.

"Yes, and a good one; and better—a very good woman."

Frances looked up at him. He was splendid-looking in the very best sense, she decided. How proud Delia would have been—*Delia*—how incongruous it all was! That this man of gentle voice and well-chosen, quiet clothes should have had that start. And yet—what better start could one have than a true knowledge of right and wrong and the shelter of real, deep love?

At the first palm-lined street, Frances dismissed her rescuer, protesting, and sent him toward his hotel. Alone, she turned and walked slowly to the one where she and her mother were stopping.

She went up through the grounds, across a heavily populated porch, and then inside the building entered a squeaking and slow-moving elevator. "Mother," she said, when she'd gained their rooms, "whom do you think I've seen? Theodore Bradly! He's out here making pictures, and because the money that was left him is largely invested in the West, and he's so nice—in the best sense. I asked him to come to see you. Was that all right?"

She sat down on the edge of the bed by her mother. "Did you rest?" she asked. "And really sleep?"

"Yes, dear. How interesting to have met that Bradly boy! I suppose he's quite grown. He was a nice *little* boy. One wonders what money will do in a case like that."

"Yes, one does," admitted Frances, taking off her gloves. "Any letters?" she asked, after a minute."

"One, but none from Julia. It was for you, dear—on the bureau. I forgot to speak of it."

"It doesn't matter," answered Frances, as she got up to get the missive. She sighed as she picked it up. It was from Philip. She read:

DEAR FRANCES:

After much reflection, I have decided that you are a silly, if dear, small lady, and that I must force from you a decision which will be a real answer to the question—the reply to which you have deferred for so long a time.

You are going to marry me. Wisdom must caution you that the happiest placing is under my care and protection. I will, I need hardly assure you, treat you with every consideration. There is (pardon the necessary allusion) sufficient money for comfort and a reasonable indulging of nice tastes, and I shall be less demanding than a younger man.

I feel sure that we shall jog along very comfortably, with a bit of travel now and again for enlivening. There are several little-done spots in Egypt that I should fairly revel in! But I must not allow my enthusiasms to take me away from the business now in hand—which is your marrying me.

For months I have awaited your capricious,

small whim, and now I demand. It must be yes or no by the end of this week. When I think of your dear life in the house across the gardens, I feel sure that you are coming to me; coming to grow into the steady, quiet-mannered, and well-rounded young woman that you should be, and reasonably to love

Your devoted

PHILIP CARPENTER.

14 February.

P. S.—You will see by the post-mark that I am in Morkley. Aunts send best love to both you and your mother, and I join them with remembrances and in the hope that Mrs. Milton is fast finding strength.—P. C.

Frances laid down the letter. She had wandered to her room as she read it and here she paused before her bureau and stared at her own lovely reflection tragically.

"I can't!" she whispered. "I can't!" This thing that had begun to seem possible before she left Morkley, seemed suddenly, dreadfully—impossible! The envelope fluttered to the floor and then another breeze came and carried the letter with it, but Frances saw nothing but Philip—Philip bowing so prettily from the waistline; Philip discussing some recent exhibition with nice restraint; Philip, trying to instil in her a taste for William Morris; Philip, with many apologies for the mention of anything so crude as food, describing a salad he had lately discovered; Philip growing almost alive over bits of Walter Pater.

Frances forgot that she might be overheard. She spoke quite loudly and in a voice which was unpleasantly tragic. "I just *can't*!" she said. Then softly opening the door she looked at the bed where her mother lay resting. And, as she looked she forgot herself. She thought of Julia and the woman who had been free from fear for the first time in so many years. She thought of them and of what they wanted for her and—of what she might do for them—under Philip's protection. Turning back very quietly she slipped down in front of a table that had on it writing things.

DEAR PHILIP:

I can't decide in that time. I am so sorry, but I just can't.

She saw the slant of her writing, realized that Philip would not approve, and en-

deavored to improve its aim in direction. The page was not impressive.

I am afraid that you will have to give me a second mortgage on deciding. It's so much more important than buying a hat, Philip, this marrying.

Just lately something inside of me has awakened and has begun to wonder. I don't know quite why it stretches from sleep, yawns, and troubles me, but it does. Frankly, I have become terribly afraid of marriage. Philip, suppose you married me, and I could not change to suit you, and suppose I should want a blind and foolish love that would love me as I am—silly, ignorant, and in so many ways so very little. I am troubled over this. I realize quite how good you are, how much too good for me; and the realization only chills me. Somehow, the warmth here has not helped. It has made me want for corresponding warmth inside.

I am so sorry. Please be patient a little longer, and I will try to be good very soon.

FRANCES.

P. S.—I am going to try really *hard* to marry you, for Julia and mother think it would be fine!—F. M. M.

Then she sealed the letter, which she forgot to date—this omission, by the way, displeased Philip Carpenter quite as much as the letter's contents—sighed, and went to post it.

On the way to the post-box she saw a chameleon sunning himself on an oleander bush. "I think you're cute," she murmured. She thought of Philip Carpenter, and her face changed. "I mean interesting," she corrected inwardly. And then she smiled, but not quite happily.

CHAPTER XXVI.

UNDERSTANDINGS.

THE following weeks were quite the most wonderful Theodore had ever known. For him California changed to paradise. Things had started with his call on Mrs. Milton, then an offer of his horses and a long drive, after which came a trip to the studio. A meeting with Frances on the beach and a walk together to her hotel had begun long tramps, in which she seemed to feel no consciousness of the unusual, and in which he felt the beautiful edges of his dreams.

"You're so good to me," he blurted out one day when a long silence had given him too much chance to feel and had weakened the resistance which kept him impersonal.

"I?" she said, with a rising inflection.

"Yes. Splendidly."

"What nonsense! Let's sit down, shall we? I haven't been good to you at all; quite the other way. I should have been so lonely tramping alone. Mother isn't up to that, you know. But she does look lots better, doesn't she?"

"Oh, yes!" he answered, as he spread out a cravenette coat on the sand. Frances settled and looked out toward the water. The sharp tang that lay in the shadowed side of the streets seemed to have caught in the color of the sea. An electric—sparkling, energetic blue it was—shading against the beach into green and bubbling white. Back of them were the Santa Maria Mountains and before these the little town, half resort, but with the steadying, permanent force of the true sons who scorned the invader.

"Some day this place will leap," said Theodore, looking toward the line of palms that marked the beginning of a street in the distance. "I imagine that we'll have our own picture company village built some time, too, for outside scenes; and use extras in huge numbers and all that sort of thing. That will make the growth of the place."

"Mr. Carpenter, the Misses Salberry's nephew—you remember them?—thinks it will grow, too," said Frances. "The fruit export made him think so. His people have always had a house near Santa Agnesia. That's about fifteen miles from here, isn't it?"

"Yes."

There was a moment of quiet while they both looked at the water and thought their thoughts. When Frances spoke, her reverie was revealed.

"What did you mean about by being good?" she asked, in a too casual manner.

"I mean your letting me see you."

"But why shouldn't I?" Frances shoved a shell around with the tip of a rose-colored parasol, as she spoke. Theodore studied

this operation with deep interest, then his eyes raised and stopped when they reached two small hands that clasped the parasol handle. They rested there for some moments and then moved away with a jerk, and he answered her question.

"Don't you remember the old days?" he said. "Don't you remember the little chap who smelled of wood smoke and of unaired clothing, the little chap who sat in your kitchen waiting for his mother to get through with your washing?"

Frances turned to look at him and he went on quickly.

"I'm not ashamed of her. Heavens, I know her greatness! She was, and is, the biggest force in my life; but the start I made with her is a divide. My place and yours in life is not the same; never will be."

He paused. "When I said you were good," he continued, "I meant in your overlooking differences, your wonderful lack of condescension. Nine people out of every ten would feel the divide you ignore, and *work* to try to make me feel it too. While you—have tried to make me forget it. You've been so good—you're more—you're wonderful!"

Frances was silent.

"Have I said more than I should?" asked Theodore humbly. He looked at her with anxiety plainly showing in his face.

Frances shook her head. "No," she answered, "but you're so foolish. I think you are splendid, as any sensible person would, because all by yourself you have cultivated the sort of tastes that make the nicest kind of person, without any one's pointing out the road. When you think of the boarding-schools, colleges, aspiring parents, and energies that are thrown away trying to point out that road to some people!" She paused, shook her head, and laughed.

"And I like you more," she went on, after she had sobered, "because you did not let sudden money, a real trial of character, spoil you. You've used it decently and you still work. You should be conceited, because you have traveled up-hill without help, while so many people travel down with all the world to help them!"

Theodore could not answer, but he set his teeth on his lower lip, and stared blindly at the tip of a rose-hued parasol.

"You must see lots of differences," he said, when he felt that his voice was under his own management once again.

"I do," she answered honestly, "in little things. You're rather afraid of me, aren't you? And you think of our kitchen a great deal, don't you?"

He nodded.

"That's so *foolish*," she said, in the gentlest little voice. "Think of those things, if you like, but don't let them hurt you!"

Suddenly she smiled up at him.

"Once you forgot, and left your spoon standing in your cup, that day you took me to tea," she said. "You should have 'Mr.' on your cards. You should not call pictures 'art,' in that hushed tone. I mean you should not say: 'Do you care for art?' but instead: 'Do you like pictures?' And you should not talk about 'classical' when you mean music that isn't rag. Understand? In these and a few other matters of vital importance, you show transplanting; but in spite of these grave errors you aren't entirely hopeless!"

Theodore grinned sheepishly. "You make those things seem so small," he said, "but the world wouldn't. It—it's just like you. You're so kind and—dear. I—I want to thank you, horribly, but I'm too stupid. I *can't* say what I mean!"

"You have nothing to thank me for, but I *do* understand!"

Theodore smiled down at her with a strange look. He did not think she *quite* understood. He hoped she never would. She was gentle and very sweet, but even she, he thought, might not understand the way he had grown to shrine her in his heart; the way he had grown to think of her and sometimes humbly dream; and lately the sudden bitter moments when he had railed against the fates, and then, from craving, remade the world. Oh, had she lived in an alley and he behind stone steps!

The girl by him spoke gravely.

"Is there any better inheritance," she asked, "than decent instincts? Aren't they the best sort of pedigree?"

She was thinking of her father and of Hargraves's mother, who, in her simple way, had all her life lived to atone. The man by her understood and, because his heart overwhelmed him with its swelling when he thought of her suffering, he forgot himself and closed his hand about hers on a parasol handle.

"It isn't fair that you should suffer," he said breathlessly. "I—" but he stopped abruptly. Her hand was so warm and so little. It folded up in his and left room for another. He hoped, as he drew a long breath, that his heart's beating wasn't shaking the wide, tan beach.

"When you think of your own self too exclusively you are apt to grow morbid, are you not?" asked Frances. "I was—just then. I do envy you. *You* should be proud." He tightened his hand. "This is like a day long ago," she went on. "You made me feel better then, too, Theodore. You're a good man, and because of what your mother gave you in real love and an instinct to do the right, a lucky one!"

Frances looked at Theodore again and smiled, but this time not brilliantly. More it was, like a small girl who remembers there is a dark closet into which it is in some one's power to put her. Theodore could not move his hand.

"I'm not so afraid of you," he whispered, looking down at her.

"I think we shall be real friends," she answered, and then, very gently, freed her hand. "I like you, because you have always liked mother," she added as she fastened a glove. "And she is so darling and good; but—so few people seem to see it, and that does hurt!"

"I know," answered the man.

"Isn't this funny?" she asked. "All this began by my trying to cheer *you* up!" Her tone changed, and Theodore knew that the moment of confidence was past. "Will you take me to tea," she said, "and not leave your spoon in the cup? That kind of thing is *so* humiliating!"

"You're laughing at me," he accused, and very happily.

"Oh, no!" she protested, "I couldn't! Do I get my tea?"

"Not a drop!" he answered sternly.

And then they got up laughing and went off toward the sleepy town. They were silent for most of the way. Once the man spoke abruptly:

"You're so good!" he said. "I can never thank you!"

She looked up at him and his heart turned over. "You were good to me, too," she answered softly, "and I shall never forget that, never!"

Back in Morkley things were going badly. Franklin Milton had taken a turn for the worse, and Julia was perplexed about whether she should wire the wanderers. It was late in March, with a dismal thaw turning the world to a combination of slushes, sneezes, and the new disease called "la grippe." Julia had gone to the neighbors for comfort and counsel, and there had found Philip Carpenter. The dainty little ladies had rustled out to order tea for "the poor, dear child," and Julia found the few minutes alone with Philip sweet, but bitterly so.

"What would you do?" she asked quickly. She was afraid of silence. There was a faint and flattering accent on the "you." Philip was aware of treason in the wish that Frances could be brought to so appeal to his superior judgment. But—of course association with him would do wonders to broaden and teach her!

"Does he ask for her?" asked, Philip, instead of answering.

"No, not yet. But I thought perhaps it would look better—ones hates to say that so crudely, but appearances have been so against us that we must consider them. What is your idea?"

"Perhaps you'd best wire," suggested Philip, and then he turned to his Aunt Letitia, who had just entered. Aunt Letitia thought, nodded with the motion of a heavy rose on a slender stem, and then advised a wire. She ended with a pat on Julia's thin shoulder, saying: "Wait a bit, dear. We'll have a cup of tea before you go back to that house."

Julia settled back gratefully. There was a wonderful peace in the time-mellowed room. The little fire leaped and then was low. Its flirtatious acts made two Chinese

vases first cast black shadows and then gray on a mahogany table leaf propped against the faintly scrolled and faded yellow paper. There were some old bits of silver in the room with copper blotches showing through where years had worn them. A hundred spots caught lights, and corners of gray made lights the lovelier.

Philip felt the atmosphere and looked at the quiet Julia with admiration. She so fitted the nice restraint! Julia felt his gaze and spoke.

"What does Frances write you?" she asked.

"She can't decide," he answered.

"Did you urge her, as I advised? Were you really firm, Philip?"

"Ah, indeed yes!"

"I don't see why she can't make up her mind," she said. "It would be splendid for her, splendid! I wish she would, Philip!"

"She will," said Miss Letitia, with more confidence than she felt. She wondered as they spoke, why Philip had not been attracted to the steadier Julia. Not that Julia was loved by them as Frances was—no. Julia's type could not bring out the affection that Frances did. But for Philip, who cared for repression, form, and the littler niceties, Julia would be the better choice. And would little Frances find happiness with him? Had she and Agnes dreamed an impossibility?

Meanwhile Philip wondered whether Julia ever remembered their younger days. Those days when he used to pick roses with her, and the day when she sent him a little note—sending him away.

A bent, old woman entered, carrying a queer, painted tray on which was a Lowestoft tea service and shining white linen.

"How very pleasant," murmured Julia. Philip was again aware of treason in the thought that would obtrude, and that thought was how his own amarita would have exclaimed: "Oh, Aunt Letty! What a ducky little tea party! I'm ever so glad I came!"

There was tea and talk that walked sedately and never skipped, and then Julia, refusing Philip's company, went slowly home. When she opened the front door

her soul chilled and then was filled with the horror of Franklin Milton. A nurse came down the stairs carrying a box of flowers.

"How do you do, Miss Julia," she murmured, and went toward the kitchen.

A great many flowers came for Franklin Milton; a great many loving messages and much sympathy. A few people knew why he was alone, why he was both feared and avoided; knew that his isolation was simply a return from a life-investment of cruelty to those nearest; but they who understood were few.

The nurse in the kitchen spoke to a maid. "More flowers," she said, with a sneer.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PLANS.

THE same day that Julia took tea at the Misses Salberry's, Frances went driving with Theodore Hargraves Bradly, of her own invitation.

It had happened in this way: Mrs. Milton, having found a group of unprejudiced folk, had found friends, and at this especial time had gone driving with a dowager of three chins and unlimited lung power.

Frances had seen them off, and then she'd stood on the hotel steps wondering what to do. Reading had gone stale, letters seemed a drudgery on such a vividly alive day, and she wanted companionship. An anemic young man who almost always carried a butterfly net was the only possibility and he, reminding Frances of Philip, made her chill, even on the sunny side of the street.

Accordingly, he was dismissed. Feeling a little lonely, she went within the small place. She asked for mail and found a letter from Philip, which added to her forlornness.

"I'll not read it now," she decided, as she went up-stairs. "There's no use spoiling the entire day. I suppose it's some more urging." And, in her room, she slipped it between the covers of the "Egoist," with the safe feeling that it would not be disturbed. Then she looked at the

telephone and made another decision. And after she did that she called Theodore's office and found him in.

"It's me—I mean I," she said after his voice answered, "and this brazen person wonders whether you could take her driving. Could you? Are you busy?"

"No, and you bet I could! I mean I'm not busy, and I'll take you anywhere."

"That's so nice of you. I shouldn't mix questions, I know," she answered, laughing a little. "Mother's gone out, and I felt a great longing to talk to some one. 'You're sure it's convenient?'"

He assured her almost hectically that it was, they arranged the time, and then she hung up the receiver and turned to the important matter of adjusting a drooping, rose-lined hat. She smiled at herself in the glass as she did this. She always felt like smiling after she had talked to Theodore. "She did not know why, but he turned her world right side out, and ironed out all the creases. She thought of the time that he had comforted her when she, as a little girl, had been so very miserable.

"He always does that to me," she realized, wonderingly. She slipped on a gray coat, and then went down-stairs and out on the hotel porch to see Theodore waiting at the curb with his good horses and smart little turnout.

"I'm sorry you came," he said, as she ran down the steps, and to her look of wonder, added: "I wanted to send up this."

With his words he handed her a card, on which "Mr." was written before an engraved name and underlined eight times.

"You silly person!" she said.

"My soul, this was nice of you!" he announced, not at all cast down by her estimate of him. "I've never had anything so nice happen to me since a little girl gave me her favorite plaything, a most charmingly docile cow, and told me to be good to her. Do you remember?"

Frances nodded. "I was good to her. You know, when I left Morkley, I hated like the dickens to leave that animal? And I really think if I'd worn it under my jacket, over my left ribs, I'd have been a better boy!"

"Evidently this is the afternoon for sentiment."

"Go ahead, make fun of me, but it's true." He smiled down at her.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"May I show you the spot where I'd like to build a house if I had enough judgment and good taste to do it, and—and a reason for it?"

"Why haven't you a reason for it?" she questioned. "Don't you want one? I think a bachelor affair would be great fun. Surely a hotel won't satisfy you always. I hate them."

"We'll go look at it," said Theodore, turning the carriage. "And if you'll plan the place and curb my natural new-moneyed desires for minarets and turrets, I'll build it. Will you do that?"

To Frances, this request was all of a piece with much of the beautiful nonsense they talked. He could pretend, as she did; and they had, most splendidly and foolishly, and had greatly enjoyed doing it. "I will," she agreed. "I'm always drawing house plans, and I'll tell you just what to wear in each room—I mean in furniture—and just what to hang on the walls. I'll love it!"

"Done," he said, as he tightened the reins and set the horses to going.

Three or four miles from town he pulled in the horses and waved a whip. "There," he said, "it is. What do you think? I hate houses on knolls. They always make me think of a wad of gum on a derby hat. I like 'em about half way up a slope, so that they have something to lean against in gentle green, and something to look down on, so that pride may be maintained. Will it do?"

"It's lovely," said Frances softly. "And, really, may I plan it?"

"You may," he replied. And then, because he was afraid of himself, he clutched wildly at the flying skirts of the superficial. "Don't forget the Indian heads in *terra cotta*," he warned, "and the aluminum sabers and hammered brass and mission stuff. The last would have a real value. Think of coming home spoofed and falling over a mission rocker! Bet a fellow would swear off."

"But you never do, Theodore."

"I haven't time, and then I've never had anything to set me to it. But, if I keep house and have to count the towels and chase red ants in May and approach the flannels with moth balls in October, I might be 'druv' to it!"

Frances laughed happily. "And I was blue when we started out!" she said.

"What made you blue?" he asked impulsively.

"I am trying to decide to be a good girl," she answered, "and do the obvious and sensible thing, which I am imagining I don't want to do, and—oh, well—I guess I'm just foolish."

She looked up at him, still smiling, but he was profoundly shocked to see that her eyes were brimming with tears. His composure almost broke.

"I must help you!" he said thickly, "You've got to let me help you!"

"You can," she replied, a little disturbed by his intensity. "Talk nonsense. Tell me about the house, what you think you want; and then I will tell you that your ideas are all wrong, for that is what decorators *always* do!"

And be it marked to Theodore's credit in a thick, gold book, mentioned in connection with Heaven's bookkeeper, St. Peter, that Theodore held on to sanity, and stifled an almost overmastering desire to comfort in the old, old manner begun by mothers, and comforted in another and a more impersonal one, used by court jesters yesterday and by vaudeville artists to-day.

"The princess commands," he said, "and I obey. May I have a *den*, and a cozy corner draped in striped stuffs and boasting of a narghile—"

"You hate all those things—you told me so," interrupted Frances.

"But I'd have to buy them. Suddenly arrived money has legs and it walks out of hands that are unused to it and up to a green-spotted vase, decorated with a seascape and gilt warts, and says: 'Come home with me! I cannot live without you!' And it would buy a den full of East Indian truck made in Kalamazoo. It always does." Theodore stopped and laughed. "Knew a fellow in Chicago," he explained,

"who bought too feet of books every pay day. The backs of them were most elaborate and always highly colored. He used to say: 'Goin' to buy another foot of books to-day! Mebbe green!' I'd do something like that!"

For an hour they talked about houses.

She told him flatly that he could not have a copy of the "Gleaners" in his house and that he must have a reception-room done in violent yellow and filled with back-breaking chairs. "It is done by the best people," she explained, with mock seriousness, "and this is to be a very proper house!"

And then, because the sun was beginning to sink, and because she told him he must, he turned the horses toward town.

"Better now?" he asked gently.

"Oh, yes."

"I'm so glad."

The horses walked, and Theodore, looking down at a bit of chin and a great deal of hat, dreamed daringly about a house, as a background—for Frances. When he first met her, he had scolded himself violently for his fancies, and he had honestly tried to keep them tied; but they were too strong and altogether broke tether. For a man in love is really no more responsible in his thinking than is a year-old baby with a molasses jug for a sticky world. So, after two weeks of mental apologies he gave it up; decided she would understand, if she could feel what his heart held; and thought of her even in the middle of dictation, to the utter bewilderment of his stenographer. Now as he looked down, she sat in his library, across from him at a dining-table, walked in his gardens; and he found dreaming, with her so close, all but unbearably sweet.

Frances, too, was busy with thoughts, but they were far from happy. Philip would be good to her—she knew that—too good. He would never lose his temper or slam a door or do anything redeemingly human. And of course she must stop saying "damn" when her hair would not go up to suit her, for he—would never understand. She thought of his being near while she brushed her waving hair, and grew sick.

She did not think she *could*!

She realized and remembered Theodore because he moved. "I've been staring in space for ten minutes," she said in consternation. "I quite forgot you—which wasn't so polite!"

"And I've been staring at you," he replied. His voice was strangely rough.

The following morning Theodore left a good many letters, in which were questions relative to lumber tracts, and wandered in the studio. He had found a handkerchief of Frances's in the trap the afternoon before, and returning it seemed an imperative matter. However, even a man in love hesitates to disturb a woman before she's had a chance to have breakfast; and so Theodore delved into everything, with his new, restless, nervous energy, and finished nothing.

"That studio spot in the 'Return of Alice,'" he complained, "is miles too thick. Looks like a fancy dress ball at Bean Center. Hello, Mae."

"Hello," answered Mae, sullenly, but her manner was not noticed.

"Where yuh been?" she asked, after ten minutes had elapsed. "I haven't saw yuh for an age."

"Busy," he answered.

There were shouts; a new set slid in, and a new arrangement began. "What's it for?" asked Theodore. Mae told him the name of the film, and saw with misery that he hadn't heard what she said—hadn't cared. "It's a girl," she thought. "It's some girl." A hot fury rose within her, and then faded, leaving her old and chill.

"I'll stand it," she thought bitterly, "if she's only *good enough*."

"Come down to see me," she said aloud. "Gravy, I wanta talk to you."

"I will," he answered, looking at his watch and then snapping the lid shut, "some time soon, but not just now. Is that clock right? Well, why not? Who regulates the clocks around here, I'd like to know? I don't understand why you should bother to hang a clock up there, if it's going to be ten minutes off—oh, hello, Wilson. What? No, I haven't time now. I'll be in to see you to-morrow."

"What's eating him?" said the man, scratching his head. Theodore had gone off toward the door.

"How should I know?" snapped Mae. "And maybe I wouldn't tell yuh, if I did know, knowing enough to mind my business and keep my mouth shut and not ask fool questions that aren't none of my affairs. Are we going to stand here, jawing all morning, or do I work, which is what I come for?"

"Aw!" said the utterly quelled man, "I didn't mean anything!"

"You'd better not," said Mae, arranging a film of tulle. Mae was, that morning, the shy and blushing bride.

Theodore hurried toward the hotel where Frances and Mrs. Milton put up. He was filled with the dreadful fear that she might have gone out. The idea was unspeakably tragic. When he at last gained the place and found she was in, and had sent up his card, life again approached the normal.

He was asked to go up to the Milton sitting-room, and it was Frances who admitted him—Frances, holding a telegram.

"It's father," she explained, without preface. "He's very ill, Julia says, and we must go home to-morrow. I'm so troubled about mother's return, you know—she still breathes badly, and spring in Morkley is so frightful—that seems heartless, but she is—everything to me."

"I know."

"The doctor told me that if she caught another cold—" Frances paused, her anxious eyes on the telegram.

"I'm so sorry."

"Thank you," she said; and then impatiently: "This is stupid. It doesn't help. We have to go, but I feel so *afraid* of it. Silly of me, isn't it? However, I'll be too busy packing, in a moment, to think. There are compensations, aren't there?"

"Let me do something for you—get your reservations, and so on, can't I?"

"That's so good of you," she answered, then stopped, thinking. "Would—or could you take mother driving?" she asked, looking up at him after a moment. "She's miserable. You see, every one here has

been so kind, and she—rather forgot. Now she's beginning to wonder whether she is wicked, and she thinks of things he's said. If you could make her forget Morkley for this morning—"

"I could do my very best, and I would be most happy to."

She nodded, turned from him, and went toward a bedroom. "And I could do the packing," she said. Then: "Mother, Theodore Brady wants you to go driving with him. Please don't disappoint him, but put on your prettiest hat, and go, for he's ever so anxious to take you!"

The day slid by for Frances. How so many frocks had gone in one tray she could not imagine. How so many skirts had neatly folded in the bottom of her mother's trunk was another riddle. Everything seemed to have grown. In the middle of the day had come a message from Theodore. He and his charge were staying out for lunch; he had reservations. He hoped she was not very tired. And she wouldn't forget to eat lunch herself? She promised him she wouldn't, and felt greatly cheered.

At about five, when everything but bags were packed, the sitting-room door opened and Mrs. Milton, followed by Theodore, entered.

"It was lovely," said Frances's mother. "I wish you could have been with us. We had a splendid lunch."

Theodore smiled at Frances across her mother's head. Frances answered the smile with gratitude.

"It was lovely," echoed Mrs. Milton, and then she saw the trunks through an open door. She moistened her lips. "It's been two months, anyway," she said, "and I—I almost believe that Mrs. Carter would like me, even in Morkley. Do you think she would, Frances?"

"I'm sure of it, dear," answered the tired-eyed girl with the loosened hair.

"And you and Julia don't think it was my fault, at least not *all* my fault," went on the older woman, who had quite forgotten Hargraves. "My father told me, before I was married, to be a good wife, and sometimes—I wonder—"

"Mother," said Frances quickly, "I want you to pack your hankies, if you

aren't too tired, and keep out ten or twelve for your suit-case and see that they don't wrinkle."

Mrs. Milton turned, quite thought-diverted, and went toward the bedroom. Frances stood erect, pushed back a lock of slipping hair, and smiled at Theodore. "I'm almost through," she said, "and I do thank you for this."

He put his hands on her shoulders.

"It wasn't anything," he said unsteadily. "I wish I could help you more. You look so tired!"

He felt no consciousness in touching her. Infinitely dear and precious as she was, she seemed for that moment to belong to him. He wanted, with incredible strength, to put his arms about her and hold her, very gently, tenderly. He knew that he could be gentle, if she needed gentleness; and he realized, through that, how deeply he cared; for in his quality of love there was no half measure.

"This meeting has been nice, hasn't it?" she asked.

And then he said something which he never realized and which she realized only after he was gone, when she was putting last touches to a rebelliously crowded suit-case.

"Dear!" she heard, in echo of Theodore Hargraves Bradly's voice, and then she felt the tightening of his strong fingers on her shoulders.

Some days later, Philip Carpenter in the East found a letter, in the writing he knew well, waiting for him on the breakfast table. He ate his grapefruit before he opened it, for he had theories about the empty stomach and endeavored to take all precautions against strain.

After he did this, he slit the envelope with a silver letter opener, noticed that the opener needed polish, spoke crisply to the servant of this, and read:

DEAR PHILIP:

I did mean to decide about our marrying, but I was so busy I couldn't, and to-morrow we leave for home. You probably know that father is sick, as you were there last Sunday. I saw that on the postmark of your letter. I am sorry I lost your letter before I read it. I thought I knew what was in it, anyway, before I read it, so I kind of put it off.

I will decide just as soon as I can, but I don't know when that will be. I realize that, as Julia says, you are far too good for me; but somehow that doesn't help me very much.

Thank you so much for "Imaginary Portraits"; the binding is beautiful.

Sincerely your friend,

FRANCES.

"Kind of put it off!" That, about one of his carefully written letters! A letter full of prettily turned sentences and nicely chosen words!

"Her immaturity is unthinkable!" he said viciously. "I—" But words failed him. He looked at the offending letter and it faded into her face. He saw golden hair, clouds of it, and her faint, sometimes almost sad, smile. She *must* decide soon. This waiting was *most* unsettling and *profoundly* disturbing! Even scarabs had lost their absorbing powers. He wanted with a want he was ashamed of, to have the thing over and "settled." He longed to begin to remold her.

He recalled the beer charities, and shook his head. There were many, many things in her of which he could not approve! Her levity, which often verged on childishness—he would show her, by a chill over-looking of that, how very silly it was. Suddenly he forgot his future's wife's schooling, as he felt the touch of her small hands between his. He moistened his lips, which had grown dry, and wondered whether love, like measles, was more severe when taken late in life, or whether every one went through this miserable period.

Reflection ceased. Her face danced before him.

"This is *damnable!*" said Philip, the chaste, and got up suddenly, leaving his three-minute-boiled egg and a half-drunk cup of coffee.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DISAPPROVAL.

SOME three weeks later Julia entered Frances's room. She stood at the foot of the bed and surveyed her younger sister with disapproval. Frances wriggled under the scrutiny, and then looked up with some defiance.

"Philip," began Julia, "tells me that—"

"Of course he does. Sneaking off and telling you every little thing I say—"

"Frances, I don't understand you! Here this good man honors you, this man who is so clever, so finely understanding, so *really* good—"

"That's just it," said Frances, pushing her chair back from her desk, "if he were a little less good, if he once got disgustingly drunk, I could stand him! It's just like a perpetual Sunday school! I feel all starched, and I feel like going off and rolling in mud. Every time my grammar falls down he gets out a stop watch and begins to count."

"Oh, Julia, *can't* you understand? The other day when we were motoring, we stopped at a little country church and I admired the stained glass; and honestly, Julia, he looked as if he had a stomach ache, and he said: 'My dear, you are jesting. That is incredibly bad!' I wasn't, but I had to let on I was. If—if I married him I'd have to lie about everything I like, for I always admire the wrong things. Anyway"—she scribbled little scrolls on her blotter—"I don't believe I love him—"

The patient Julia looked exhausted.

"I am so tired of this," she began, "I am so tired of you! Frances, frankly, Philip Carpenter is far above you! He is—he is—well, simply wonderful! You—you don't seem to realize his character, his wonderful—" She stopped, baffled for the adequate and enough strong word. "I'm so tired of this," she ended lamely.

"Well," said Frances, "if you are, you can imagine I am! I wish Philip Carpenter was in an old ladies' home and would let me *alone*! Julia, don't look like that! Please don't. It's this way, Julia; I am all upset. I don't know what I do want. One morning I get up and think he's splendid and think I could sacrifice and go to the man who needs me most and all that kind of stuff; and the next day I honestly wish he'd trip and fall down some well, ever so deep, you know. Julia don't be so stern! And I don't know where I am. Last night I told him that I wanted to forget him for this summer—that if I didn't think of him, nor see him that per-

haps I *would* know when I did see him. That's all mixed, but you know what I mean. I've been trying to get up enough courage to tell you."

Julia was without words.

"All I can say—" she began, and then with a shake of her head, vanished from the room. In her own room she stood by a window, nervous hands plaiting a scrim curtain. "Little fool!" she whispered, "little fool—when she could be—" But she could not finish. Instead she turned quickly from the window. The world was a place of cruelly bright sunlight, and she felt that she wanted some dark, small spot where she could be alone.

Frances, left alone, felt, for a moment, vaguely guilty; decided to forget her guilt, and began making plans—they were for Theodore Bradly's house. She spent an hour on them and at that only succeeded in finishing the first floor. The second floor was not at all on the same principle as the first, being a wing affair, and the first a square, sedate thing.

She would, she decided, keep the second, and decide on cretonnes and colorings before she sent it on. To her, the whole thing was a fairy castle, and great fun. She had always loved imaginings, perhaps more than most people, from the fact that she had grown up so much alone. Dreaming, like any other faculty, grows from exercise. After a brief reflection, she wrote:

The reception-room should be done in yellow, so that it will hurt people's eyes; for if you want them to stay, you do not usher them in there. There will be no need to furnish it, for all the mistakes you buy will naturally gravitate toward it; they always do. Chief among these is a hammered brass stand topped by a fern which is always moth-eaten and always dry. Do not forget these details, Teddy; they are most important.

Now, to be serious with your dream-house, I have planned a huge hall which I would Flemish, if I were you. I thought, because the climate of California makes the air too clear and bright and the sunlight too sunny, a dark-walled place would be charming to enter. I wouldn't have many pictures—I'll tell you about them later. They must be good copies by good copyists, and I don't suppose you know a Bellini from a Christy girl. I shall not like it if you buy them by the car-load.

I'd have lots of growing things around in dull, tan pots, and a piano. I've thought of a dull-red tiled floor; but perhaps it would be too cold, even in an air castle. Perhaps you can pick up some choir stalls from some antique importer, and they would look ever so well against your paneled walls. You might achieve some tapestries, but those can't be got in a hurry.

You will notice that the full face of my house is stern, Teddy. I got my inspiration from the county jail. The windows want to be well set in the wall, long and narrow, divided in the center to increase length look, and to open out, so that the cold, mosquitoes, June bugs, and bats may enter at will. I thought of gray stone for the place, for my idea was that a man's house should be cold-faced. I cannot see it little, porched, or anything but stiff or dignified; so it must be built that way.

After you know the man, he relaxes, and so with the house. You go into a Flemish hall, soft toned, restful, and full of chairs which almost scream "Sit!" And then you go on and out on the green-roofed porch straight opposite the front door. This place is full of wicker furniture, pillows, palms, tables loaded with aerated books and bushels of magazines. At four thirty a tea-wagon will wiggle out and dispense tea for me (I am coming to visit you), and a great many sandwiches, and something bottled for you, if you like. And we will *not* talk about art, nor anything usually associated with tea and the weak-minded.

In your library are dark cases without doors, built in cases, and above them are blue—deep, deep—blue walls. There is a cast, a Greek and busted cast, above the mantel. The fireplace is very big; the table ten feet long, and has at each end writing materials and blue blotters edged with dull copper, two lamps, and books and books and books.

I can see it all, and it looks ever so nice to me. I am already visiting you, so please decide about the floors. I have brought my feet up to expect a floor. I do not know how they would act without one, never having tried them.

Please be careful of these plans, for I have worked quite an hour at them. I shall do the up-stairs some other time. It will not be at all the shape of the down-stairs, and there the air-castle has the advantage of the mere house!

I did enjoy seeing you so much. Please write me more of your work. Those long mountain trips do sound so lovely.

Ever your friend,

FRANCES MILTON.

After she finished the letter she addressed an envelope to a spot in southern

California. It was near the site of a big picture company and within a few miles of a winter resort generally popular with Easterners. Philip Carpenter had a house there. Should she marry Philip, thought Frances, with a recurrence of the question she so wanted to forget, she would probably see Theodore often. That would be nice. The idea of marrying Philip became more possible. A dream of long afternoons of motoring with Theodore made her smile, but then, she reflected, perhaps Philip might object. It would be just like him! She slammed down a paper weight. Her temper was becoming most erratic.

"Miss Frances," she heard, and turned, "your mother's in the garden." It was the day nurse who spoke. "And I think it's too damp for her. North and south changes are trying, you know, and her cold is bad."

"I know. Thank you, Miss Martin," said Frances, and then she wrote a hurried postscript.

P. S.—I thank you for one box of Huyler's, one bunch of roses (pink), one mess of lilies of the valley (white), and for countless other favors. I kept one pink rose. It is mashed in a desk drawer. It has an erstwhile flavor. I am undecided whether to give it a course of massage or violet rays.

Please write me soon, Theodore. Your letters help a lot. I am ashamed to mention this, ashamed of letting myself dwell on my own feelings; but I am not so very happy just now. Your letters are so comforting. They are like the gentle and reassuring pressure of a good friend's hand.—F. M.

After she had sealed and stamped the envelope, she picked up a sweater and hurried toward the garden. She found her mother looking down at a spot of ground near the largest pine tree.

"When I was first married," she confided, "I had a garden, and here I planted pansies—such big ones. I thought them very pretty. Your father did not—did not like the lawn cut up, and so—so I stopped my gardening." She turned wistful eyes toward the house. "Go in?" she said in answer to Frances's urging. "I'd rather stay outside. I—I like it better."

As the days passed, things grew more bitterly unpleasant. Franklin Milton, hav-

ing grown steadily more ill, was steadily more cruel. He lay, propped high in a four-poster bed, and planned plans for the safe keeping of his money.

"Women," he would say piously, "are incapable of its handling. And—I should not wish to see my dear ones beggared, even though they—" And then he would stop, sighing deeply. The day nurse, whose name was Martin, heard him talking to the Presbyterian minister. "And so," he had said, "I shall leave it in trust, and I shall depend upon you, dear friend, and one or two more of my intimates, to speak frankly when you think it used unwisely. You will do this?"

The Presbyterian minister bowed his head.

"And it is my wish—in fact there is a clause to that effect in my will—that this, my humble earth home, shall never be abandoned by my family. Perhaps, in the shelter of its dear walls, they may come to understand—and love me—when I am gone."

Franklin Milton's voice had dropped at the end of the sentence. His listener had been deeply touched and had sniffed and blown his nose.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FEAR AND PAIN.

A VERY high motor sped through a spring land. It was in the early days of motors; they were called automobiles, with a French accent, and they chugged greatly and were regarded with suspicion and fear.

It was not like Philip Carpenter to own such a contrivance, but his innamorata had expressed a desire to ride in one, and he, being entirely gone and not in the least himself, had bought something that needed a fire-escape, that wound up in front, and of which he was really very much afraid.

"Stop," ordered Frances. Philip gritted his teeth, attacked a lever, and they stopped. Frances had turned and was looking across a valley which stretched below them.

"Pretty," she said. "The new green is

so saucy. It sort of comes up and kicks you in the shins and says, 'You can't ignore me, I'm here!'"

"Ah—you mean that it is overapparent? That it is not a striving voice, but a too loud song? You, perhaps, recall Emerson's lines, beginning:

"Winters know
Easily to shed the snow,
But the untaught spring is wise—

"Ah, the next lines eludes me! 'The untaught spring is wise,' and—and—"

"Never mind," said Frances. "I hate being quoted at."

Philip stiffened. The girl by him saw it and smiled. She had wanted that stifening.

"May I ask the cause of your mirth?" asked Philip frigidly.

"You," answered Frances, "and me. The way I shock you and the way you want me to marry you, anyway. It is really ever so funny! And Philip, I have to laugh every time I think of your kissing anybody. I can't imagine it!"

Philip turned quickly. He had grown very white, for he was more angered than he had been since his school days. This time Frances had gone a step too far. He gripped her shoulders with passion-strong hands and kissed her—kissed her cruelly.

"Does it—make you—laugh now?" he asked breathlessly, after long seconds.

Frances straightened a hat. "I really *can't* marry you," she whispered. "I can't. Take me home."

And Philip gritted his teeth and attacked a lever.

Four months before, across the continent, things had begun to happen to Theodore. The house was to go up as nearly as possible after Frances's plans, and on the spot where they had dreamed it. It had achieved a cellar and promised, some day, to grow up.

This especial morning, Theodore, Charlie, and the architect stood looking toward the start, deep in discussion.

"But," said the much-tried architect, with a despairing look toward Theodore, "you can't put a three-winged up-stairs on

a square first floor! Not unless you build her on the pier principle! You *can't*!"

Theodore ran his hands through his hair. "But I want it that way," he said. "that's the way she—I mean, it—is."

"Can't yuh change it?" asked Charlie. "You aren't generally so darned set." Theodore sat down on a pile of boards and inspected the cellar of his house. The architect and Charlie inspected him. For a reasonable man with a good business head, he was certainly acting most childishly.

"Go ahead," he said at last, in answer to their scrutiny. "Do just as *you* please. Of course it's my house, but *that* doesn't make any difference. Just suit yourselves!"

He flung aside his cigarette and glared at some drop-curtain-looking mountains in the distance. Charlie said good-by to the baffled and annoyed architect and sat down beside Theodore.

"Gravy," he said, "what's wrong?"

"Everything."

"Yes—I knew something was. For the first time in our years together you been cross to me. I ain't used to it—from you."

"I'm sorry, Charlie."

"Ain't you satisfied? Look around yuh, boy! Ain't you done good with that there money and set on it judicious and hatched more? Ain't you interested in business and doing good? Ain't your investments the best on the Coast? Ain't you got everything you want in the world?"

"No."

"Well, you darned ungrateful kid! You—well, damned if I ain't minded to lam yuh? What's up?"

Theodore Hargraves Bradley tossed aside a cigarette and looked at his partner. "Charlie," he said, "I'm a fool! I've been thinking, Lord, thinking *all the time*, of something I can never have, and I want it—so that I can't eat or sleep or live. I want it so that I— What's the use?"

He got up quickly, and smiling with a queer little twist, spoke again: "I'm darned sorry I've been cross," he said gently. "I never want to be, Charlie. You've been mighty good to me."

And then he strolled off and stood looking into the cellar of the living-room.

And she would sit in front of the fire,

reading perhaps, and she'd wear one of those soft house dresses in which he'd seen her on those southern evenings. And he'd sit near. He never could imagine, nor make her talk in dreams, but he could see her, plainly, plainly. She moved, smiled, and held out a hand, and his dream was so strong that he caught his breath. Across the cellar was a smart scuffle, and then a little boy's strident yell.

"Yuh darned kid!" growled one of the workmen, who had been pelted with mud balls, "I'll learn yuh to behave! I'll learn yuh to be a gent!"

And with his words a dream faded. Delia smiled in an alley home, and the smell of yellow soap arose to make a wall.

"What a fool!" said Theodore Hargraves Bradley viciously, "what a miserable fool I am!"

The house developed charmingly. It had a decidedly warm feel, even while quite untrimmed. Theodore decided again and again, not to dream so wildly, but found himself breaking resolves and dreaming anew. It was so easy to imagine Frances within his walls!

One Saturday found him late at lunch. He did not see Charlie's approach.

"Why, hello!" he cried, as Charlie laid a broad hand on his shoulder. "Glad to see you! Sit down and have something to eat."

"I have et," replied Charlie. "I like that there place where I am, being as I was raised on a hash diet and being too old to change. Now you're different. You could walk with the best, and—"

The younger man interrupted with a laugh and then asked how "Mildred's Prayer" was coming on. He shook his head after his question, but added that that ought to take the crowd.

Charlie was fumbling in his pocket. "Almost forgot your mail that come to the studio," he said, as he went from pocket to pocket. "Seen one had a Kansas postmark. Thought mebbe the Prairie Oil Company 'd wrote. Then there was a lotta them drop ones; one from yer tailor—mebbe a bill—I couldn't figure out—here they are—and one from your home town."

"Home town!" echoed Hargraves, and he pushed aside a plate of camembert and crackers to reach for the letters.

A half hour later he was hurrying toward "home" which, having achieved a roof, floors, and some other little necessities, began to seem real. Now and again he slid a hand in an inner pocket to feel a letter. The half-holiday had left the spot quiet after noontime, and Hargraves, hunting a key, unlocked his own front door with a pleasant feeling of ownership. As the door swung open, he sniffed the new wood smell with appreciation. One spot of the plaster at the end of the hall was slow in drying, he saw, and he wondered about it as he went toward the library, slitting open a letter. There was a keg in front of the huge fireplace, and he settled on that. For one moment he held the letter in his hands uncertainly and then he kissed it swiftly. He felt curiously conscious.

"I'm a fool," he muttered, "and she wouldn't take it, but—Heavens!" And then he drew forth the letter and read:

MY DEAR THEODORE:

I am going to marry Mr. Philip Carpenter, who is a nephew of the Misses Salberry. He is a very kind man. [The thought changed abruptly.] It was lovely to see you. I enjoyed it. I hope with all my heart that your life will be happy. Philip [Theodore winced] has a house in Santa Agnesia, and if we are ever there, I hope so much I shall see you. I do hope your life will be very happy.

Your true friend,

FRANCES MILTON.

He crumpled the letter swiftly and then smoothed it out and sat looking down at it. Anyway, her hand had shaken. He saw that in the unsteady, uphill writing. He moistened his lips, for he had begun to feel the ache.

He could not—*could not* let that other man have her! She was—*his*. He smoothed the letter again. Suddenly he held it against his cheek. "Frances," he whispered, "Frances!" He felt his eyes smart and, for the first time in long years, they were moist. It brought to mind tears over hard-learned lessons in an alley home. "It ain't like you was a gent by rights," he heard Delia say. "Yuh gotta work to make yourself one, seeing as how you

was brung up in an alley. A gent!" He'd never dreamed of asking her. He laughed miserably at the thought, but her marrying— He began to shake.

"By God!" he said aloud and harshly, "by God, she's mine!" And the empty walls caught his words, tuned them a key higher, and sent them back to laugh at him.

How long he was there, he never knew, but the shadows were black and the sun had gone when he stood up, cramped and aching. He heard a noise at the door, and prayed for strength. He did not see how he could stand seeing Charlie—just then. He opened the door.

"Gravy," said the little, bent old man, "where yuh been? I been that worried about you! I can't eat right when I ain't no idea where you are. Where yuh been, sonny? It's almost eight!"

"I guess I must have gone to sleep—"

"Haven't you et nothing?"

"Don't believe I have, but I'm all right. Don't worry, Charlie."

"Yuh ain't feeling peaked, are yuh?" inquired Charlie anxiously.

"No, I'm all right."

Charlie, only half-reassured, wandered about inspecting. "This here's a grand house," he said, blinking in the half dark, "but it seems like you ought to get married; oughta be a nice little woman here to nag you about the ashes from your pipe and to make you wear gum shoes every time there's a fog. Ain't there going to be one, Gravy? You're getting on; you'd better look around pretty soon or you won't have no pick of 'em. Ain't you going to, Gravy?"

Gravy did not answer. He was staring absently out of a lead-glassed window. Charlie repeated his question and then went over to stand by Hargraves. He put a hand on the younger man's shoulder and spoke almost in a whisper. "What's wrong?" he asked. "For the last two months something's been up! Me and Mae'd rather be horsewhipped than see you down. What you done for us, we ain't never forgot and couldn't never. We care a lot about yuh—more 'n you'll ever know, Gravy."

Theodore Hargraves Bradley smiled. Then he gripped Charlie's broad, stubby hand. "That helps, Charlie," he said. "That helps!" And Charlie, looking on his smile, thought of Elsie's deliberately planned smiles, planned for him, after Elizabeth had gone.

If Theodore Bradley had seen the writing of his letter, and what came before, his hell would have considerably faded in intensity. But—he did not see the return of a much-frightened and very white young woman from a motor ride, nor hear the questionings of an also white older sister.

"And you said you would never marry him?" Julia had said after some moments of unhappy talk. Frances nodded, and then began to cry in a loose-sobbed, little-girl fashion.

"I can't," she sobbed, "I can't! Oh, I can't!"

"And all winter you have let him think you would—all winter you have—" There was a noise at the door and Mrs. Milton entered. "I heard," she said, "and I must speak to Frances, too. She must go, Julia, she must, mustn't she? Just yesterday—he told me—that Mrs. Gailor and Dr. Smythe are to overlook all the accounts. He—he plans that—and other things. And this house—think of your spending long years here, you and Julia. I don't know how long—I'll be here, and to think of you and Julia left—"

She stopped and caught her breath, and went on, speaking fast: "You must marry him; Julia says he is a good man. I loved, and now—look! If there were money it would all be different, but there is none. He knows you don't care for him?"

"Yes," said Frances, twisting her dampened handkerchief, "and he wants me to marry him, anyway—it makes me hate him—"

"But he is good," said her mother in a baffled voice, "and Julia says he would be kind, and then there would be somewhere for Julia to go to, occasionally, when she could stand it no longer."

The woman stopped speaking, grew white, and leaning forward spoke in a whisper.

"You cannot work," she said. "I tried. *How much do you remember?* Everywhere I was turned away. Sometimes after a day or so, sometimes at first, always with knowing smiles or a sneer. For he has money and a wish to hurt. No woman can fight that."

Suddenly she lost her unusual strength and was again her shadowed, fearing little self. "And Julia would have somewhere to go," she said with a backward look toward the door, "and perhaps even I might come sometimes, too, and it would be—something like California—anywhere—away from here."

Frances, extremely white, stood up. She remembered her mother's little vacation from scorn, her pathetic wish to please people, and her constant fear that each day would bring a change in her new friends.

"I'll marry him," she said unsteadily, "I'll be glad to—do it. I love you both so much. I'll marry him and we'll all try to be happier. I'll do—all I can." And then she left the room.

Julia looked worried, but her mother felt none of that. Love had been absent for so many years that she could not sense a hungering for it, nor for any greater gift than gentleness and a kind husband.

"I'm so glad! So glad!" she whispered.

"It is the best for her," said Julia, almost defiantly. "Some day she will realize it. It is the best for her, I *know* it is! Her position is not like most girls, and she has known very few young people. If Philip had not come, who—"

Julia stopped and thought of the son of Delia Riggs. She repeated her statement with more bravery. "It is the very best for her," she said, "some day she will realize it."

July found Morkley warm, murkily warm, and with everything moist to touch. Mr. Philip Carpenter, in his cool, shadowed room of his aunts' house, wished he did not have to go out in the sunlight and across the hedge. Why, she liked sitting out in the sticky heat, he could not say. It was, he thought, like everything else. They hardly agreed about anything. He

wondered savagely what he would have done without Julia's smoothing out of the courtship. As it was, there was a very small rose bloom and a great many thorns.

He went down-stairs with the unpleasant consciousness that he was some considerable years in advance of the person who was to be his wife. She never minded heat and didn't know what it was to feel tired, and instead of pitying him she advised him to do something heavier in the way of exercise than collecting scarabs. After this advice, by the way, there had been a cold, quiet interval, in which Mr. Carpenter had expressed a deep disapproval.

She was awaiting him on a white bench, which stood beneath a pine tree.

"Hot," she said. He nodded and then spoke. "Good afternoon, my dear," he said, and dropped down on the bench beside her. He took one of her hands and touched it with his lips. Although no one was near, he did not kiss her. He felt that this savored of kitchen steps, policemen, and happy biddies. It was not quite "nice."

"What have you been doing to-day?" he asked. Not that he really wanted to know, but because there seemed to be nothing else to say.

"Ripping the trimming from a hat," she answered, "and swearing."

"My dear!" His tone showed disbelief.

"I was," she said, and then sighed, half smiling at him. "You want to have so pedestaled an opinion of me," she said, "it quite wears me out to live up to it. I have a childish temper at some times and positively enjoy acting naughty at others and I love to think of squelching people I don't like. Why, my pet day-dream is seeing all the women I particularly dislike parading down the main aisle of church in red underwear. Sometimes during the sermon, I can see them!"

Philip frowned. "If I were you, my dear," he advised, "I would not dwell on revenge. I should simply enjoy the superiority of a forgiving heart."

Frances wrinkled her nose. "Don't wanta," she said. Philip could not deny that that wrinkled nose was attractive, but as a habit—certainly it could not be cul-

tivated in his wife. To say the least it lacked dignity. He started to speak, sighed, and gave the matter up. The reform would come after a November wedding. He sighed again. There was so very much in her to change!

"This has been a luxuriant season," said Philip, "prefaced by a beautiful spring."

"Was it?" asked Frances. "I don't know what's wrong, but the weather all seems the same to me lately—and—I can't remember that we had any spring at all. Everything seems very level—and gray."

CHAPTER XXX.

CRISIS.

THEODORE HARGRAVES BRADLY had tried, in the months that had passed, to write Frances Mary Milton. He had tried very hard—in that time that had been so dismal and had hurt so terribly to live—and he had failed.

He had decided early in September that he would write, simply would, for she had been so kind to him. She had even called him that dear name—friend—and it was barely possible that his omission might make her feel some slight hurt. Hurt her? Well—

So he lit one of the new electric drop lights, pulled a chair close to his desk and began:

"My dear Miss Frances: I hope you will be very happy. No one could wish you more of that than I. Mr. Carpenter is to be congratulated—" He stopped, muttered: "Damn it! What driveling rot! Never talk that sort of set idiocy to her." And he threw aside the sheet.

"I hope you will be very happy," he wrote, after the second start. "When I first had your letter I could not reconcile myself to it, but now I think if you find content—and I pray more—I will be a little more able to—" He stopped again. That was manifestly impossible. He tore the sheet across.

He picked up a fresh sheet of paper, laid it down, and began to play a game. He wrote fast and before he had written ten words his hand was shaking and he

breathed rather shortly, but he smiled, for he was pretending that it was real, that she was his, and that he might send it.

"Dearest," he started boldly, and then because he found it very wonderful to write "dearest," he added two more. "I love you so," he went on, "that life without you is half alive and all an ache, that moonlight viewed without you is a superior sort of rack, and I suffer the tortures of the damned when twilight comes, for I want you most fiendishly then. For twilight was built to make men know of mystery and to help women understand the mystery of what I lay at your dear, small feet. I love you tenderly, dearest, and I could gently, but I have wanted, from the way I love you, to hurt you, absolutely hurt you. I—but what's the use?"

"I love you cruelly, frightfully, tenderly, and truly."

Theodore stopped and raised his pen. His eyes lost their brilliancy, for he had come back to his real world. The dream had flown.

"But before God," he said aloud to an empty room, "she's mine. I know, I *know* she's mine—" And then he thought of a letter and he stopped. She was not his. She was to marry a man named Philip Carpenter, who was well-connected, and a "very kind man."

Theodore Hargraves Bradly took his letter, tore it into bits, tossed them into a waste basket, and then jamming a hat on his head, he went out into the night. He rode out to his house, the work on which he had caused to cease, and sat staring at it. It was well lit by the moonlight, but its darkened windows made it very, very cold.

He thought of the might-have-been and then, face set, started on.

"I've got to get a grip on myself," he said aloud, "got to!" But he stopped on a little bridge of slender rails and looked down into some dark, dark water. He wondered whether people did go on after *it* and whether there was love there? And, if there was, whether the fellow might try to make the girl he cared for—care? And why God—or who ever it was—let a little chap start out in the world with only half

a ticket? And what sort of a devil would help him start in that uneven, murky way? And then, because he had stared down into the water too long, because he had begun to wonder whether it was cold, he said quite loudly: "*By God! I'm not a quitter!*" And he started his motor quickly.

He hurried on to find Charlie and, finding him, talked feverishly about pictures. It helped, he found, for he had needed the touch of other little humans who had stumbled over their sobs.

The same September saw things dragging on at the Milton house with very little change. The younger Milton, people said, looked white and rather miserable. Remorse and realization was whispered as the probable cause. Mrs. Milton, too, was ill, but her illness received scant sympathy.

This special morning, toward the end of the month, was one of those hazy mornings when one smells dust and drying leaves. Outside things were beginning to be shabby, as nature laid aside her summer frocks, and shivered while she waited for her winter ones.

Annie, who was beginning her own September, paused at the front door. The stair was long to Annie. After she had looked for a minute at a yellow and golden world, and seen it not at all, she turned and hurried toward Frances's room.

"A letter fer yuh," she said as she stood in Frances's door.

"Oh, thank you," said Frances, "but you shouldn't have come up. Did the groceries come?"

"Yessum, we need lard. I disremembered to tell yuh."

"I'll order it," said Frances, as she surveyed Philip Carpenter's stationery. It was *so* correct, the stamp was so neatly attached! Annie still stood in the doorway. She fingered the edge of her apron. Frances looked at her with inquiry.

"Looka here," said Annie abruptly, in a rough voice that showed embarrassment. "I've knew you since you was too small to walk, or I wouldn't be saying nothing now, but Miss Frances, deary, he ain't the gent for you. He ain't your style!"

Frances drew a long breath. She tried

to be indignant, she tried to deny Annie's truth, but she could not.

"Annie dear," said Frances, "I'm going to tell you something because you gave me sugar cookies and love when I need both so much—and you had such a nice, loving lap, Annie! But after I tell you, we must never speak of this again. Julia thinks I should do this and so does mother. Mother asked me to—she—she thinks she isn't going to live long and she's worried about leaving me—here. She's been better since I promised her, and Mr. Carpenter is *good*, Annie. Really he is!"

"It ain't that—"

"There are things in life which you dislike very much," continued Frances, "but which are best to do. More and more one realizes how unimportant the individual is—or should be—and how it's being a well-trained cog that counts—and going where one is needed the most. And sometimes"—Frances's face grew wistful—"they say that love comes after marriage."

Annie sniffed. "If he would act natural and idiotic," she complained, "the way folks do when they're in love, then I wouldn't be kicking. But, my Lord, Miss Frances, you with yer whole life layin' ahead, to be tied to that there old clothes tree! Now Julia and him would 'a' been a grand match. I sez to Maggie Lafferty—she was cook fer a spell years back; remember her, deary?—I sez, 'Now ain't that grand, them old maids hookin' up?' It was when Julia and Philip was sweet on each other. I dunno what busted it up, but I wish to glory—"

"Annie dear," said Frances quickly, "I'm sure this will turn out happily, sure of it, and I think perhaps you'd better go down-stairs; I heard the phone—"

And then alone she wiped her eyes and opened Philip's letter.

MY DEAR:

I trust that all is going well with you. Each day I await your letter eagerly, and with the deep and sincere hope that your burdens may be lightened by your mother's regaining strength.

There was a page in the same vein. It was nicely expressed, with possibly a boiled-

water flavor. She continued to read on another page:

I have picked up a bit of an Egyptian trinket for you, an amulet, interesting in its way, and about which Dr. Steadman and I quite agree. It is a good example of the XVIII Dynasty. The glaze is, as you will notice, particularly fine.

I am, my dear, most devotedly yours,

PHILIP CARPENTER.

"Don't want it," said Frances aloud. Her eyes ran down the page. She knew the ending. It was always the same.

She reached hurriedly for a sheet of paper. Began to write quickly and on the bias; this she knew would displease Philip—he had commented on it before. But she had no time to rewrite it, so she corrected her writing and the page looked like a jig-saw puzzle. She wrote:

DEAR PHILIP:

Please, if you are going to send me a present, send me a hat-box instead of an amulet. I couldn't use an amulet very often, and I've always wanted a leather hat-box lined with cretonne, and with my initials on it; but don't put Morkley on it, as I sha'n't live here after I am married. If you would just as soon send me the hat-box, Philip, I would be much more pleased.

Julia entered; Frances stopped writing, looked up, and explained the hat-box inspiration. Julia sat down suddenly. She shook her head and then remonstrated.

"But," said Frances petulantly, "I don't *want* an amulet, or whatever it is. After I'm dead, he can decorate me all over with them. I won't care, then, but what could I use it for now? You can't wear them, can you? And it would make me feel funny. I don't *like* dead relics. I get all over goose flesh over them!"

She jabbed holes in the blotter with her pen and her face had grown almost sullen.

Julia sighed, drew a longer breath, and began to explain the utter impossibility of such a request. Frances didn't reply, but went on jabbing holes in a much-abused blotter. Suddenly a girl, who wore white and whose face echoed her garb, appeared in the doorway.

"Your mother—" she began in a voice that was unnecessarily loud.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

The Fifth Sense

by John D. Swain



ISRAEL NICHOLS conducts one of the few commercial enterprises over which the hue—and odor—of romance still lingers. His little botanical chemist shop on South Market Street, Boston, has not changed at all since his grandfather opened the place.

Its small-paned display windows, the three worn granite steps leading up from the pavement, the tiers of black walnut drawers, each with its porcelain label and wooden knobs, represent the original fixtures. Yet, the pompous furnishings of many a State Street office not a furlong up-town, would not fetch, roll top desks, swivel chairs, steel filing cabinet, framed pictures, rug and all, what one of Nichols's two solid San Domingo mahogany counters would, brought up in an old-time wind-jammer, and many a collector yearns for his Venetian mirror, fetched across in a clipper-built vessel eighty years ago.

The ancient brass scales, the heavy pressed glass mortar and pestle in which strange incantations have been wrought, the two enormous snuff jars—one for Scotch, another for "Irish High Toast," have all been used by men who voted for Andrew Jackson's predecessor.

The boy who put up the wooden shutters every Saturday night, and sprinkled and swept the floor every now and then, was either the same one who had done so when Lafayette and Adelina Patti and Buffalo Bill made their farewell tours—or belonged to the same litter; and the melancholy clerk was a victim of arrested development, or had found a fount of perpetual middle age.

It was old Israel himself who made the shop pay. He was as striking a type as the bust of Aesculapius which stood on a little cornice over the door. Tall and portly, with venerable locks, clad in a Prince Albert suit with white piqué waistcoat and spotless ministerial cravat, he spent many hours a day waiting upon his trade; and of all the men I have dealt with, he was the very hardest to escape without a purchase under your arm, or in your pocket.

Not that he pressed his wares upon you—he was too much the artist, too much the fine gentleman for that! And, of course, most people entered his place with a very clear notion of what they wanted, and they nearly always found it; sometimes after more or less ransacking in dusty drawers, fumbling amid the bundles of dried herbs hung from ceiling beams, or rummaging among queer shaped bottles and flasks.

A typical afternoon trade would comprise: several old gentlewomen in search of fresh catnip; a state senator looking for a half pound of caravan tea, fetched across Mongolia, and never permitted to touch earth, hanging from bamboo tripods at night. This tea was cheap at twelve dollars the pound. Then, a schoolboy for a generous length of licorice root, another old lady for a packet of senna, and others for sage, or boneset, or real spruce gum; sundry old men for snuff—a little more pungent here than at the tobacconist's; a pert maid looking for canary seed; a Russian priest, for frankincense; a North End belle with pimpled cheeks, desirous of a porcelain jar of Nichols's famous red clover blood purifier;

a jockey in search of *Cannabis indica* for a sick racer; a Grand Army veteran seeking a bottle of elderberry and dandelion wine, smelling of drowsy country lanes on a hot August afternoon, and with a potential kick stored up from ten years of solitary confinement in its oak prison in the cellar; a Mount Vernon Street dowager who knew of Nichols's potpourri, made of the roses of yesteryear embalmed in spices; an old-fashioned practitioner with a prescription to be dispensed.

The ancient ledgers, with their records running back to the days when it was not strictly prudent for estimable old ladies to maintain black cats, were already pledged to the Bostonian Society. The spindles of dog-eared prescriptions, looking curiously like dusty Chinese lanterns, numbered a score or more.

The young man who precipitately entered this little shop on an afternoon when trade was dull was not seeking an emergency remedy for a sick cat nor a moulting parrot. Truth was, he did not even know what wares were dispensed. His sole thought was to avoid meeting a gentleman who held his I. O. U. for a larger sum than he could raise, at this time.

It was any port in a storm, as he burst in with an eagerness that brought Israel Nichols from his tilted-back chair at the rear, to the front show-case.

Mr. George Pettus, an agreeable and good-looking young attorney who needed only clients to ensure his success at the bar, cast a hasty glance about the crowded den in which he found himself. His eyes passed over the bundles of dried herbs suspended over his head. The great jar of balm-of-Gilead buds, the trays of buchu leaves and camomile blossoms, the china pots, and squatty vials of unguents, salves, and lotions with no clear idea of the nature of the enterprise; but, realizing that some remark was in order since the benevolent old gentleman was gazing at him with polite attention, he pointed at random toward a row of tiny bottles filled, apparently, with green-gray dust, and asked:

"What are these for?"

It was a sufficiently futile remark; but the proprietor evinced no surprise. Instead,

and quite as a Yankee might be expected to do, he countered with another question.

"You are acquainted, sir, with *Calamintha officinalis*? Or catnip, as it is vulgarly called?"

The young lawyer was not, and said so.

Israel Nichols studied him with frank interest.

"I should say that you are one of only three people I have met in a long and, I trust, not useless life, who isn't," he said; and then, in a different tone, and half turning his head, he called: *Æsculapius!* Come here, old chap!"

Following his gaze, George Pettus beheld an enormously fat, double-toed cat materialize from the shadows at the end of the shop, and approach with the noiseless grace of its kind along the counter, skilfully avoiding many small objects upon the glass case, and, having arrived at their end, seating himself and studying the old man with sleepy jade eyes.

His master reached up to a shelf and took down a glass jar with a tight cover, from which he removed a morsel of fresh catnip leaves which he placed upon the glass.

Instantly a great change came over the cat. From lazy inattention, it awoke to life. Its eyes dilated, its back arched, and a deep rumble came from its throat. It threw itself upon one side, reaching out and deftly picking up the sprig of catnip with its paws, smelling of it ecstatically, tossing it in air, gradually working itself up to a sort of subdued frenzy in which it rolled over and over, curled its claws, raised its purring to a surprising volume, and finally, having knocked the catnip to the floor, jumped down back of the counter and passed from the young man's sight.

"Such is the well-known effect of this pleasing herb upon *felis domesticus*; a fact know to practically every one above the age of five years," declared Nichols.

"And now as to your question concerning the contents of the little bottles. I have long felt that there might be in Nature's bountiful storehouse, some botanical specimen which should act upon *genus homo* in the same way; but I never expected to be the one to discover it.

"However, a few weeks ago, in a remote

part of the Middlesex Fells, I was so happy as to stumble upon a shrub whose leaves have precisely this effect. Its species is as yet unknown to me; Linnæus and Gray do not even hint at it. Three or four bushes, growing only in this particular locality, are all that I have been able to find. Its therapeutic value I have not yet determined."

George Pettus was becoming interested.

"I say—do you really mean that it makes men act like—like your cat?"

"Exactly that."

"But—but how do you know?"

Israel Nichols smiled indulgently.

"First, because I chewed and smelled the bark and leaves when I found the shrub. Afterward, I was exceedingly gratified that I was alone."

"Just how did it make you feel?"

The proprietor weighed the question carefully.

"Well—I should say, just as the catnip made Æsculapius feel," he decided.

The instinct to cross-examine made George Pettus continue.

"How can you be sure it didn't just happen in your case?"

"Because I gave some to my clerk, and also my office boy; and it affected them likewise. And I do not mind confessing that I secretly administered a little to my landlady, an odious harpy! It exerts its peculiar power with both sexes, and all ages."

"You mean—that is—you—er—roll over, and—"

Israel Nichols reached into the case and extracted one of the tiny bottles.

"I beg you to try a little for yourself?"

"No! No!" refused Pettus, backing hastily away. "But when you gave it to these others, did you have a—er—recurrence of the symptoms?"

"Certainly not! I took the precaution of breathing through my mouth. This herb, like catnip, imparts its effect through the olfactory nerves. Too little attention has been paid to the importance of smell in our lives, because we of an effete civilization have very largely lost this sense. It is unfortunate, having only five, that we should surrender one capable of furnishing the most intense pleasure.

"The dog lives virtually in a universe of odors. Other animals, and all primitive races, rely far more upon smell than they do upon touch, taste or hearing. Yet even in our debased state, consider what poignant memories are stirred in us by a sudden whiff of some perfume favored by a lady we haven't thought of in years; by a spray of orange blossoms, or pond lilies, or lilacs; consider the irresistible aroma of a batch of home-made bread hot from mother's oven—or of the shore at low tide to an old sailor who has been marooned for years in Iowa!

"Experts test whisky, not by drinking it, but by rubbing a few drops on their palms and *smelling*; cheese buyers, also—"

"I rather think I'd like a bottle of this—what do you call it?"

"I have not decided," confessed Israel Nichols; "but let us for convenience call it *man-nip*—as a play upon *cat-nip*."

"Would you mind demonstrating its action by stuffing a little for me, sir?"

"I am well stricken in years," declared the shopkeeper; "and not, I trust, lacking in a certain dignity befitting them! You are, however, at liberty to return the purchase if it is not in every way satisfactory. The price is five dollars—because there is none other to be had, and a very limited supply of that."

George Pettus sighed. Even five dollars seemed a considerable sum in his present circumstances, but a wild idea had entered his head. Coupled with it, however, was a perfectly natural fear. He had the normal man's repugnance to a resort to drugs, strengthened by an utter ignorance of toxicology. Suppose he were to purchase, of this queer character, in this strange little shop, some powerful deliriant, whose action should have disastrous consequences?

"Could you give me a little clearer idea—expressed in terms a layman can grasp—of just what it is that takes place inside of a man when he—er—inhalates *man-nip*?"

"I cannot," Israel admitted promptly. "Go to the Harvard laboratories, and seek out their best man in *materia medica*. You will find that he cannot even tell you the reason why catnip affects a cat as it does. Yet this simple garden plant has been

known for centuries. It possesses therapeutic value for human beings; but it produces in them no such reactions as it does in the cat tribe.

"Tobacco is eagerly swallowed by horses, and is a recognized veterinary remedy. Swallowed by man, it produces violent nausea. My own experiments lead me to conclude that the botanical specimen I have discovered, and which has no effect whatever upon my cat, stimulates some one or more of the ductless glands in the human system, which were classified as useless vestigia—like the appendix—until a few years ago, but are now known to be tremendously important. Several of their active principles are now marketed, and, administered hypodermically, produce results that would seem miraculous to a practitioner of a generation ago. All that I can tell you of *man-nip* is that it produces the symptoms I have outlined, and that it is perfectly harmless!"

Two minutes later, George was hurrying toward State Street with the little bottle in his waistcoat pocket, and directions as to its use in his head.

He had been, when the sudden appearance of his creditor forced him to dodge into the botanical chemist's, on his way to an unpleasant interview—of that he was sure—with the father of the girl he longed to share his poverty with. Not precisely that, of course; he had but just been admitted to the bar, and had every belief in himself.

Unfortunately Darius Hammond was less optimistic. He had made his name and fortune so many years ago, that he had almost forgotten that he had been a poor young teller when he married Sallie's mother. He liked young Pettus immensely, but knew of half a dozen other suitors he liked nearly as well, who were also young and good-looking, and who could spot George a couple of hundred thousand or so, well invested—some of it, by the way, invested with Hammond.

Pettus was to spend the week-end with the Hammonds at Marblehead Neck; and when the broker had telephoned him to call in and see him at his State Street office on his way to the North Station, George knew instinctively that he was to be warned not

to let the full moon then making Marblehead night glorious, go to his head.

As he turned into the rather dingy entrance of the old financial fortress, George breathing carefully through his mouth, removed the stopper from the little bottle, and very gingerly poured out a pinch of the dried leaf dust upon his handkerchief, whose corner he carefully folded over twice, and replaced in his breast pocket. A moment later he was shown into the private office of Darius Hammond.

"Ah, Pettus! Glad to see you, young fellow! Have a seat and a cigar!"

He pushed a box of Havanas across the desk.

"Glad to know you are going to be our guest over Sunday," he continued. "Can't be there myself—got to run down to New York—but the madam and Sallie will do the honors. Hmmp! Ahem! By the way—you know, Pettus, we are all fond of you, look on you as one of our boys, and all that—"

George had absent-mindedly, but with exceeding care, drawn forth his handkerchief, and wiped his brow. The day was hot, and the action a perfectly natural one. Hammond, in fact, did not even take note of it, absorbed in what he was trying to say; nor that George, before replacing it, flicked the linen square toward him gently, leaving a few tiny and practically invisible motes floating in the air, which he gently propelled from him by exhaling a deep sigh.

"But," continued Hammond with a friendly smile, "you know Sallie is pretty young, and she is the apple—the—er—apple—"

The broker paused uncertainly, and a curious dilation of the pupils was noted by the respectfully attentive George. He was a thick-set man, with a high color. His mouth closed, opened again, and he seemed about to speak; but suddenly—and despite himself, to the young man's horror—he leaned forward, his eyes in a fixed stare, fingers working convulsively.

As if unable to contain himself, he plunged forward from his chair and landed on all-fours upon the soft rug beside his desk. Strange groans of agonizing joy came

from his throat; he rolled over upon his back, arms and legs pawing wildly in the air.

It was all over in a moment, and he sat, bewildered upon his rug, and allowed his solicitous visitor to assist him to his feet, whence he sank back into his chair, mopping his own profusely perspiring brow, and gazing uneasily about the room.

"Most extraordinary!" he exploded. "Can't imagine what came over me. Never felt anything like it before!"

"All right now, sir?" said George, offering a glass of water from the cooler. "Was ~~was~~ it painful, sir?"

"N-no," considered Hammond. "I shouldn't call it that, at all. If it didn't sound so damned silly, I'd say it was rather enjoyable. But weird! Like nothing I ever experienced."

"You've been working at too high tension, sir, these hot days! Ought to let up a bit till we get one of our east winds. I am certain it's nothing serious. Shall I call your physician?"

"No! By all means! I don't want anybody to know a thing about this, George; *anybody*, understand?"

He rose, and proved to his satisfaction that he had full and vigorous use of all his limbs. In fact, he hadn't felt so good for a long time!

"Believe I'll take the boat to New York," he decided. "Be better than a hot sleeper. I'll have Jones telephone for a stateroom now. But first, I've felt for a long time that I'd like to have a bright young man handle a little of our business. Young blood, you know! That's why—er—I telephoned you, George! Help you as an introduction to some others on the street, too. Here—I'll just give you a retainer."

He filled in and signed a check. "And remember, my boy, not a word of this what-do-you-call-it, to the folks in Marblehead! Run along now, and have a good time!"

Outside, George for the first time looked at his check.

It was for one thousand dollars!

All the way up the spur line to Marblehead that afternoon, his happiness was marred solely by the thought of Cecil Chatworthy, who was one of the Hammond

house party. Ordinarily, he would have considered himself as good a man as Cecil in every way; but young Englishmen seemed to exercise a fatal charm upon otherwise well-poised American girls.

They hung on phrases which, coming from Yankee lips, would have sounded banal. They copied their accent, and weird slang, and walk, and asked their advice about tea, and tennis, and clothes; and whoever saw a decently dressed Englishwoman, anyhow? But so it was!

Sallie met him at the wharf, but Chatworthy was along, too. In a jiffy their launch slid up to the Eastern Yacht Club float, and they piled into the car awaiting them.

"We meant to come over for you in Cecil—Mr. Chatworthy's hydroplane," she informed him; "but something went wrong with the wretched engine."

"Beastly bore!" murmured Chatworthy, looking it himself.

That Friday evening, George hadn't a moment alone with Sallie; and he missed no chances, at that. He was still feeling grumpy early next morning when he came down-stairs for a before-breakfast dip in the sea. He was the first one up. Upon the hall table lay the morning mail.

There was nothing for him—he had no reason to expect there would be—but, as in turning over the letters he came across a big square one with the address of a London firm embossed upon the flap, a sudden idea came to him. He glanced furtively about. No one was in sight.

Hastily he slit one corner of Chatworthy's solitary envelope with his pen-knife, and into it poured a little familiar green-gray dust. A moment later, he was hurrying down the gravel path to the Hammond's oceanside bath-house.

Concerning what occurred before he returned with a famous appetite, he could only speak from hearsay. Three or four of the young men guests had come down together, it seemed, and pounced upon their mail.

"Rummet thing you ever saw!" Percy Whibble told him excitedly. "Everybody running over his letters—we all had at least one apiece—and suddenly poor old Cecil

goes all to the bad. Just sort of groans, and crumples up, and rolls all over the floor, for all the world like a cat! Lasted what seemed like an hour, but couldn't have been over a minute or two, and then gets up and just bolts. Dropped his letter—and—of course we didn't read it, but as I picked it up we all noticed it; the thought occurred to us he might have received bad news from home, or something like that.

"And what do you think? The envelope bore the address of his *tailor*! Now how on earth could *that* have affected poor old Cecil so? It must have been a staggering *dun*; but we all supposed the boy was rolling in money, you know!"

Chatworthy did not appear at breakfast, which was always a buffet affair. Nobody set eyes upon him until luncheon. Of all races on earth, the Briton hates worst of all to be conspicuous, or to fail to run true to form.

Totally unable to solve the incredible ecstasy which had seized and unmanned him and, overbearing the custom of years and the inheritance of generations, had forced him to play the fool in public, nothing but his iron sense of what was due his hostess brought him back at all. As far as he was personally concerned, he would have abandoned his kit-bag and all his clothes, and taken the first train to Boston, and embarked for the other side.

Nobody could say where he went after lunch, but he disappeared before any excursions could be broached. For the time at least, he ceased to be a rival. The gentle inquiries of Mrs. Hammond and her daughter were even more bitter than the flippant ones of some of Sallie's "flappers," who begged him to "be sure to let them all know when he was going to do it again, please!"

On George Sallie took pity by sending everybody else packing off to a tennis tournament across the Neck, saying that this afternoon was his, because the rest had been there all the week, and there were the cat-class races and dinner at the yacht club for Sunday, and every minute of her time would be accounted for.

So they went off at last, filling a touring car and two roadsters; and presently Mrs.

Hammond left the two on the piazza, and retired for her siesta.

For two hours George Pettus forgot even the thousand-dollar check resting next his heart, and the little bottle which should have reposed in his waistcoat — but had fallen out.

At five o'clock, a gentle tinkly, rattly, rumbly sound heralded the arrival of the tea wagon.

The Hammond butler always prepared and served this himself. There would be Russian tea, and horses' necks, and caviar, nasturtium, Virginia ham and lettuce sandwiches, and scones, currant buns, bar-le-duc, and cream cheese.

The not unwelcome intruder could be heard from far back in the house as he wheeled his rubber-tired cart over the intervening floors. Just before he passed out onto the piazza, he paused. This was when he picked up a curious little glass vial, and thrust it into his pocket. A moment later he drew up before them, and began to jettison his fragrant cargo.

The tea wagon unladen, and his further assistance undesired, he stood for an instant for a final survey, lest he might have forgotten some item. It never *had* happened—but he was a reasonable man, and knew that it *might*.

Absent-mindedly, his hand sought the little glass bottle he had picked up, and he drew it forth and observed it. He had no idea what it might be. Sachet, possibly; though in a cheap and common container he disliked to associate with any of their guests. Still standing there, a few yards behind the young couple, he turned the cork with thumb and finger, lifted the bottle, and smelled its contents.

Porson was one of the finest butlers on the west side of the Atlantic. His numerous recommendations were genuine, and deserved. If to Cecil Chatworthy it was calamity to be made ridiculous, to Porson it was pestilence and death.

The dreadful struggle he made to retain self-control, to preserve reason, before he finally yielded to the sinister allure of the unfamiliar odor, was known only to himself, since Sallie and George did not notice

him at all until a loud, strangling gasp caused them to turn just as Porson succumbed, and debased himself forever by groveling upon the piazza in a frenzy of ignoble delight.

When the harrowing scene was over, and the poor wretch had crawled to his feet, unable to so much as utter a word of explanation or apology, George, who had reasons of his own for feeling no apprehension,

found that Sallie was clinging desperately to him, and hiding her face in his shoulder; since nothing more alarming than the collapse of the impeccable Porson had ever entered her sheltered young life!

Neither of them noticed that the butler, shaken to the soul as he was, nevertheless, carefully picked up a little bottle, recorked it, and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket as he tottered away.

Retribution

by
Wolcott
LeClair Beard



IN a vine-covered cottage, shaded by stately trees, Captain William Hazard and Miss Fanny Price lived alone. Taken by itself, this statement might seem to imply that the cottage in question was the home of sugary romance, or brazen impropriety, or both. Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth.

The trees shading that cottage were palms. The cottage stood a little apart from a large cluster of other buildings on property belonging to the Mexican Products Company. Billy Hazard, late of the engineers, United States Army, was the general manager of that company's works; Fanny Price—Francis Henry Price, to give him the benefit of his full name—was its chemist. The two, who had been classmates in years not so very long gone by, were having breakfast on the veranda.

"Was *El Retribudór* defeated badly?" asked Fanny, continuing a desultory conversation.

"So it's said," answered Billy. "His gang broke and scattered, I believe. Probably, though, they scattered only in order

to reassemble at some point agreed upon. Government troops down here aren't very efficient soldiers; I doubt if there was any systematic pursuit."

"Where do you suppose he is now?"

"*El Retribudór*? How in blazes should I know?" asked Billy in return, with his mouth full of fried banana. "The beggar's not on my visiting list. Gimme some more coffee."

Reaching forward, Fanny would have complied with this request, had the coffee-pot behaved itself. But the coffee-pot did not behave itself. It leaped into the air with a sound that was like a metallic cry of protest. It turned a somersault, while its contents flew over the table in four amber-colored geysers that issued from its top, its spout, and two holes in its sides; then bounced off the veranda rail onto the lawn beneath. A bullet slapped its way into the side of the house. Two or three seconds later the report of a rifle floated to the ears of the two young men from some low, wooded hills that defined the farther side of the valley.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Fanny, wrinkling his nose with disgust at the mess on the cloth, and at the same time clapping his hands.

Almost instantly there appeared a pretty, half-breed Indian servant, a woman of fifteen; for in that country there are many wives and mothers whose years number less than that. Fanny told her, in Spanish, to bring more coffee. She smiled and vanished.

"Now, who do you suppose fired that shot?" asked Miss Fanny, with mild interest, as the girl left.

"Who? Mike Clancy, of course!" growled Billy. "I lent him a rifle, and gave him and Pablo permission to ride over there, where they said they had seen deer-tracks. I'll have a few words to say to that scatter-brained Irishman when he gets back. It was just like him never to think which way his gun was pointed, once he got sight of his game."

"Yes," sighed Fanny, losing interest. "I suppose it was Mike. I thought it might be *El Retribudór*."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Billy, with heartfelt earnestness.

"I don't know," rejoined Fanny. "It might be rather fun. I've invented such a delightful surprise for him—gas warfare; his men aren't used to that. Chlorine is the only gas we have enough materials for. Bags of salt, with a little bottle of acid and a few bits of scrap iron inside each bag. When the bag falls the impact causes the iron to break the bottle. How's that for a chemical shell?"

"Well, there seems to be one trifling oversight," answered Billy sarcastically. "I refer, of course, to our utter lack of anything capable of throwing such a contraption."

"But I've thought that all out," protested Miss Fanny eagerly. "See those two tall, slim palms, standing close together over there? They're quiñara palms, such as Indian bows are made of. Behead those palms—bend 'em back, lash a plank between 'em for a shelf to lay the salt-bags on, tie one end of a rope to the plank and anchor the other, leaving a length sufficient to check the spring at whatever point you want, according to the range—and you have

a machine something like the medieval 'ballista,' the forerunner of our siege artillery, functioning without noise or smoke. See?"

"I see," answered Hazard. "It's an ingenious scheme. It might work."

"Work! It couldn't help but work," cried Fanny indignantly.

Billy made no reply. He was thinking, thinking as he had thought many times before, what a pity it was that Fanny—from childhood Francis Henry Price had been known as "Fanny"—that Fanny should be handicapped by an unkind fate not only with that effeminate manner, but also with a body so weak as to frustrate practically every ambition that surged within it. For notwithstanding that handicap—underneath that ladylike voice and manner—Fanny Price was, to quote Billy's mental phraseology, "a real he-man in all that the words imply."

As a matter of fact, Billy was not entirely correct in his estimate. To call Fanny an uncommonly reckless boy would have been nearer the truth. Take that matter of *El Retribudór*, for example.

No one knew *El Retribudór's* real name. He was said to be an ex-lieutenant of Villa's who, having tired of his chief's comparatively moderate methods, had struck out for himself. His aim was to found, in his native country, an empire on a plan compounded of those of Maximilian and the ancient Montezuma, with improvements of his own devising.

To this end he had collected a following of men who could discern no essential difference between the founding of this empire and the life of banditry to which many of them had always been accustomed. This was because no essential difference existed.

There were minor differences, however. *El Retribudór* had evolved a technique of torture and extortion beside which the methods of his former chief, even though those methods were the outgrowth of precedents established by the Spanish Inquisition, took on the amateurish aspect of a high-school hazing-bee.

Fanny, like everybody else in Mexico, had heard what a visit from *El Retribudór* would mean. Yet with perfect sincerity he

had said that such a visit might be "rather fun." Just now he wanted his coffee, and was peevish because it hadn't come.

"I wonder what's keeping that girl!" said he, and just then Maria appeared. She was an intelligent girl; so intelligent that of late Fanny had been making use of her as a sort of laboratory assistant. He was really fond of her, because she was so smilingly willing as well as so handy in her work. She was not smiling now, however; her face was anxious and distressed. The sight of it jarred on Miss Fanny.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" he asked impatiently. "Has something gone amiss with the wedding preparations? Or have you quarreled with Pablo?"

"There has been no quarrel, Don Francisco," the girl replied. "But I am afraid. I am not sure—he is so far away—but I think it is Pablo whom I see now, as he rides toward us."

She pointed as she spoke to a speck moving toward them across the valley. Picking up a pair of binoculars that stood on the veranda rail, Billy rose and focussed his glasses on that speck.

"It is Pablo," said Billy after a moment. "There's a bloody rag around his head. His horse is lathered white, and about all in, but he's riding hell-for-leather, nevertheless. Something's wrong. I don't like to give a false alarm, but time may be precious. I'll take a chance."

Roads and paths in the vicinity of the works, which had been empty a few minutes before, now were thronged. Along each of them there passed, going in opposite directions, two streams of laughing, chattering men, and a few women, for the shifts were changing. Drawing a whistle from his pocket, Hazard sounded a shrill blast, a pause, and two more; then another three.

It was the general alarm. At the first note every voice was hushed, every foot seemed frozen in its tracks, as all waited to hear the end. As the last shrill blast sounded the streams of work-people whirled and eddied and broke as the individuals composing them rushed to their stations. Whistles blown by foremen and subforemen, all of whom now automatically became military officers in the scheme of defense

carefully planned and rehearsed by Hazard himself—the whistle of every engine in those great works—all took up the alarm. The air was rent with a shrieking dissonance that almost drowned the sound of curt commands. From the corrals there trotted a troop of cavalry—Hazard's picked men—without uniforms, but in an accurate column of fours, that halted near the house.

Then the uproar and confusion ended only a little less suddenly than it began. The company's works were ready and waiting for whatever might befall.

There was a pause, almost as though the entire community held its breath, while those on the veranda watched for the reappearance of Pablo, Hazard's trusted henchman and pretty Maria's intended husband, from behind some trees that now concealed him.

When, after some minutes that seemed almost endless, he did appear, it could be seen that the horse, as well as the rider, was wounded. A few staggering strides and the poor animal pitched headlong, like a shot rabbit, flinging its rider far beyond. Both lay very still on the sunlit grass.

Laying one hand on the veranda rail, Billy vaulted over, shouting a command as he did so. Four troopers flung themselves from their mounts, and, picking up the unconscious Pablo, carried him into the house, with Maria fluttering in anxious attendance. One of the company doctors, who had seen the occurrence, came running to lend his aid. Hazard went with him.

Fanny weakly sank back in his chair and poured himself another cup of coffee, for the sight of the accident turned him faint and sick. He hated himself for this weakness, and struggled against it; but it was no use. He was always that way.

He had nearly finished his coffee, and was feeling better when Billy returned, his face now as anxious as Maria's own. Fanny looked at him inquiringly.

"Pablo isn't badly hurt," said Billy in answer to the unspoken question. "He lost some blood through his wound and broke an arm when his horse went down. But that's not the point. Pablo and Clancy ran against one of *El Retribudór's* patrols—probably the same one that fired that shot

at us. From their talk, while he was their prisoner, he learned that *El Retribudór* has something less than half of his men. The rest are to join him here. If they do join him—good night! Our only chance is to lick that bunch in detail. So I'm going now with the mounted men to hold them in check until the infantry can come up."

He turned and shouted a command. Two platoons swung into a hand-gallop and started forward toward the spot from which that shot had come, cheering as they went.

"How about the works and the women here while you're gone?" asked Fanny.

"I'm leaving you a hundred and fifty men—" Billy began.

"Fine," Miss Fanny interrupted with a beaming smile. "Beat it, then, with an easy mind. If our friend *El Retribudór* should appear, just watch my smoke."

So Billy swung into his saddle, and with his cavalry behind him, rode away. He rode away because he had no other choice, but his mind, as he went, was far from easy. Perforce he had left Miss Fanny in command at the works. Miss Fanny had read much of the theory of war, but his inexperience, his recklessness, and his personality alike tended to unfit him for executive military command. Still, there was nothing else to do, and so, again to quote Billy's mental phraseology, "the bet had to go as it lay."

Halting to breathe his horses at the foot of the hills, Billy looked back, through his glasses, at the place he had left. He saw the column of his infantry crawling snake-like across the valley, and knew from the distance that it already had traversed how its officers were hurrying their men. He saw that the two quíñara palms, growing near the house, already were beheaded, showing that Miss Fanny was busied with the ballista of which he had spoken. He saw that the men left behind were at their stations. So he sighed and rode on, hoping for the best.

He did not ride far—only a little way up the hill—before somebody—Hazard did not know who—shouted, and pointed to a spot a little to one side of the line of march. Billy looked, saw, cursed, and again halted the column. He himself wheeled his horse

and galloped to the point indicated. Before he reached it his horse reared, shied, and finally stood trembling and reluctant, his nostrils cracking. It takes long to accustom horses to the smell and sight of blood; Billy's mount had not been accustomed.

The blood had come from Clancy, or what once had been Clancy. From Mike Clancy, who had gone out with Pablo to shoot deer, and who, with him, had been taken by one of *El Retribudór's* patrols, but who, unlike Pablo, had failed to escape.

Mike was dead; there could be no doubt of that, nor could there be any doubt of the fact that he had been dead only a few minutes. Nor of how he died. His agonized face, his body stripped and maimed—maimed with fiendishly scientific precision, calculated to bring a maximum of pain as long continued as possible—all these things told their own story.

Hazard covered the dead face with his handkerchief. It was all he could do just then. Thoughtfully he remounted.

"They hadn't much time to operate, or they'd have done worse yet; and that's the one crumb of comfort in the whole hellish affair," said he, then added musingly: "*El Retribudór!* In the mongrel Spanish prevalent here that means, as well as I can make out: 'He who brings retribution.' Well, if I have any say in the matter, this chap'll bring retribution, all right; and get the full benefit of it."

It was to himself that Billy spoke, for he had fallen into that habit, as do many men who are much alone, when strongly affected, as Billy was affected now. For he had seen much violent death in France; but never had he seen anything like poor Clancy. Most fervently did he determine that neither he nor any one else should see such a thing again, emanating from the same source; not if uncounted expenditure of energy and lives could prevent it.

He put his cavalry in motion and brought it into a trot as a spatter of distant rifle-shots told him that his advance guard was already engaged. Billy smiled with grim satisfaction as he reached the crest of the rise. Here a messenger met him, spurring hard up the far slope. Once more Hazard halted his men.

"*El Retribudór!*" cried the messenger, as soon as he was close enough. "*El Retribudór* himself, with five hundred men, is about to force the gorge on this road at the foot of the slope, a mile farther on. The commander of the advance guard bids me say that he cannot hold it; he has not enough men to occupy the heights."

Billy looked behind him at the approaching column of infantry, which was much closer than it had been, owing to the halts. He looked around him at the terrain. On one side of the road was a hill so steep as to be almost a precipice, covered with undergrowth and loose rocks. On the other side, a smooth meadow sloped gently upward to a fringe of trees and brush. It was the only road in that direction for many weary Mexican *leguas*. So Billy grinned again.

"Give the commander of the advance guard my compliments," said he. "Tell him to fall back upon the crest of this hill as soon as the enemy is deployed. Hurry!"

As the makeshift orderly galloped back Billy despatched another orderly to the command of the infantry. Then he led his cavalry to the left, behind that fringe of trees which concealed it. Here he formed it into line and ordered the men to dismount, but held them in ranks. Then he waited, sick with the suspense of inaction.

Gradually, however, and at intervals that were not nearly as long as they seemed to be, this suspense and anxiety were relieved. A subordinate officer, left behind for the purpose, came and reported that the infantry had arrived, and also that it had been deployed and made to lie down just behind the crest of the hill. He saw his advance guard, pursued by the enemy, retreating, scorpion like; sullenly, and with its sting in its tail, until it finally vanished over the crest of the hill. He saw the enemy advance guard in pursuit met with a rifle fire that was weak, yet sustained and strong enough to send it scurrying back to the main body, which thereupon began to deploy.

Then was Billy's anxiety replaced with a joy that is among the sweetest and rarest in the world—that of the commander who sees his plans working with mathematical precision.

Billy saw *El Retribudór*, characteristically the leader of murderous thieves, with his swarthy face of brutal ferocity, superbly mounted on a horse that was infinitely the superior of the two animals. At a signal from this creature his line of attack advanced, followed closely—too closely—by their supports.

In a whisper Billy ordered the word passed to mount, and was obeyed. Regardless of the comparatively weak fire that had driven back their advance guard, and which was maintained without increase, the enemy's ranks pressed on. Billy sent another whispered order passing from man to man:

"Machetes!"

The yard-long blades, to which the hands that gripped them had been used from childhood, flashed from their leather scabbards and glimmered in the sun.

"Forward—march!" Billy had thoughtlessly spoken in English, and hastened to qualify his command: "*A paso lento!*" And to the credit of the discipline he maintained he it said that of every horseman, though all were straining forward, figuratively speaking, like eager hounds in leash, none moved forward at a gait faster than a walk.

To the infantry this movement was an eagerly awaited signal. As it was seen there crashed forth a withering volley from every rifle that could be brought to bear, and afterward continued with fire at will, so that the hilltop crackled and sparkled like a dynamo. In a confusion that was almost a panic, the attacking line fell back upon the supports. This was the psychological instant.

"*A paso redoblado!*" yelled Billy; then, as the horses broke into a canter: "*Cárguen!*"

With the wild, exultant shriek that Latins use for a cheer, his cavalry sprang forward as fast as the horses could lay hoof to the ground, with Billy at its head. He knew, of course, that according to the theorists he had no business there, for he was in supreme command; but he knew also that for men such as his the requirements are different. That a leader of such men must actually lead. Of this he was glad, at that moment,

from his very marrow outward. For *El Retribudór* still was in sight, surging through his disordered ranks and trying, with blows and blistering oaths, to rally them.

Then the charge went home. It was nothing like the warfare he had known—this smashing impact. Never afterward could Billy Hazard's memory recall what followed in anything like an ordered sequence.

He felt the opposing lines meet as waves might meet. The rest, for a time, was a nightmare whirl of shots, blows, yells and polyglot curses; dust, flashing steel and horses that struck and rent each other with their teeth in sympathy with their riders. And above all, distinct where all else was confused, appeared the piglike face of *El Retribudór*, which Billy fought to reach with a sort of frenzied hatred, but which always seemed to retreat as he approached, which was the most nightmareish part of it all.

The flight of time meant nothing to Billy now; he was not conscious that it did pass. He vaguely knew that the enemy, all the time keeping up a desperate hand-to-hand rear-guard action, still was retreating so rapidly that the infantry was left behind. In the same way he knew that the enemy, presumably reenforced by newly arrived hands of his own men, made a stand and was forcing Billy and his horsemen back so that once more the issue was in doubt; knew that fresh infantry had charged *El Retribudór's* unguarded flank as he had charged it with his cavalry at the first meeting, and he even found time to wonder whence that fresh infantry could have come. But wherever they might have come from, their arrival seemed to mark the final turning-point.

Once more the enemy was in retreat. Once more *El Retribudór* in person came to rally his men. Billy saw an opening, like a "hole" in a football defense, in the bandit chief's personal guard. He set his spurs hard, and with a convulsive bound his horse carried him through. *El Retribudór's* big, white teeth bared in a snarl like that of a wild beast as he aimed a whistling saber-cut at Billy's head.

Billy ducked it. He flung his pistol, which was empty, into that snarling face, and closed. For an instant, as he wrestled there, he caught sight of the faces of some of the fresh infantry. They belonged to men among those whom he had left at the works, under Miss Fanny's command, to defend it in case of need. A feeling of dismay shot through his mind at the realization.

Then ten million beautiful stars danced before Billy's eyes for the fraction of a split second, and the world vanished in darkness and oblivion.

How long a time elapsed before the existence of external affairs reasserted itself was something that Billy never knew. But the sun was high now, and blood from a wound in his shoulder, from a bullet that had passed diagonally through, grazing his spine, was not only clotted, but nearly dry.

Billy saw that he was far over the range of hills that would have to be reached and climbed before he could even reach the valley that lay between them and the works. Around him lay dead men and dead horses, but no living thing could be seen save the buzzards, already gathering for their feast.

He rose and staggered for a few homeward steps, but the earth heaved like a sea, and he had to sit down and rest. But he rose again, and again staggered on—and again, and yet again. Every step made it seem more impossible to take the next one, but an overmastering fear drew him back to the works. He could make so close a guess as to what happened there that he felt it to be no guess at all; that he knew.

Some wounded man—a mounted man, probably—had returned and told Miss Fanny of a fight, the issue of which was in doubt, but which, if successful, would result in the extermination of *El Retribudór* and his entire band. Whereupon Fanny, with that characteristic, irresponsible recklessness of his, had sent out the men left him for defense of the works, probably to the very last man. This was Billy's first guess, and his confidence in it was justified; he had guessed right.

But what would happen then? For it was almost certain that some of *El Retribudór's* men would appear at the works, ac-

cording to their orders, to await the coming of their chief. Of that Billy was still more certain than he was of the first guess. Yet Billy was wrong.

Miss Fanny had not really been so lacking in forethought as his friend feared. In his own esteem he was acting with what he considered actual military cleverness. He had finished his ballista and tested it; it worked to perfection. The air was still. With a few bags of salt and acid he could fill the lower portion of that valley so full of chlorine that for an enemy to pass it would mean certain death to man and horse.

But that an enemy might not choose to cross the valley—might not choose to play the game according to the rules as he conceived them—was something that never occurred to poor Miss Fanny's mind. So he went cheerfully to work, Maria assisting him, to make an extra supply of his prepared salt bags, and feared no harm.

To the mind of *El Retribudór*, however, Miss Fanny's rules did not occur; and it was *El Retribudór* himself who appeared. He was hard pressed. His weakened force had met a second defeat far more crushing than the first had been, and far more unexpected. Many of those who had been with him were dead, and nearly all the rest were scattered far and wide, hotly pursued and killed, like the vermin they were, when overtaken. He himself had twice been slightly wounded.

Desperate and nearly exhausted, with about twenty followers, who were in no better plight, he determined, with audacious caution, to go to the one place where at the same time his pursuers would least expect to find him, and where he would be most likely to find reinforcements from those who had been commanded to gather there.

Having made a circuit of the company's works, he issued from the wooded country that reached close to the rear of that vine-covered cottage. No one offered any resistance; there was no one to do so. No one, in fact, saw him to realize who he was until, with his twenty men behind him, he came swaggering around the cottage onto the lawn at its front. There he halted with his followers at his heels, and looked around him.

Only two people were visible to *El Retribudór* and his men. One was Miss Fanny, who had been filling the last of his "chemical shells," and who, discovering that he lacked the necessary bottle of acid, had sent Maria to fetch it. The other was Maria, who had filled and corked the bottle and was bringing it from the laboratory.

What followed was by no means up to *El Retribudór's* usual standard of conduct. In explanation it should be noted that he was not in his customary sportive mood when he was wont to unite the business of inspiring terror with the pleasure of devising new and ingenious methods of accomplishing this end. All that he now desired was rest and refreshment in reasonable security for a short time, until he could gather a few more of his men and set forth again. Therefore his conduct was—for him—a matter of the most humdrum routine.

Poor Miss Fanny's back was turned, his hands were in his pockets, and he was whistling to himself, thoroughly satisfied with the work he had so nearly completed. At first he did not see the party that approached; then something made him turn.

Then it was that Miss Fanny belied the name by which he was known. He knew what he had to expect; knew what those women there at the works had to expect, and undoubtedly his thought was of them. Like a flash he stooped and, catching up two of the salt-bags, one in each hand, raised them, intending to dash them down between himself and *El Retribudór's* advancing party, involving both them and him in the destruction that must follow.

Quick as he was, however, the invaders were quicker still. Three men sprang forward, snatched away the bags, and two of them pinioned Fanny's arms. The third bandit whirled a huge machete high in the air.

The *machetero*, as huge and even more brawny than his chief, stood directly before Fanny's eyes; and Fanny did not close his eyes. If death had to come, at least he would look it in the face, and die game, as a man should. Therefore he saw the machete, as it hissed through the air. Guard himself he could not; but his legs were free. Desperately, and with all his strength behind

it, he darted one foot forward in a sudden kick.

It was not a severe kick, as kicks go, for the necessary muscular strength was lacking, but it was wholly unexpected. The *machetero* gasped, for most of the breath was momentarily driven from his body; but the blow fell for all that. He who delivered it prided himself upon splitting to the chin any head at which he struck, and in that he failed; but it fell. It sheared downward through hair and scalp, flesh and bone. It left one side of Fanny's head a crimson horror.

The two men who had pinioned Fanny now released his arms and stepped quickly away. Before the wilting body had time to touch ground, the *machetero* threw down his reddened weapon and, dropping to his knees, clutched with eagerness Miss Fanny's ankles.

"I speak for the boots!" he cried. "They're mine!"

This man was proud of his small feet, and something much stronger than one of Fanny's kicks was needed to jar that pride out of him. But *El Retribudór* was not as amused at this evidence of his follower's thrift as ordinarily he would have been. There was no time now for such foolery. So he cursed the man for a clumsy, bungling fool, and kicked him again.

"Go get that girl and bring her here," he ordered.

During the few seconds that had elapsed since the coming of the bandits, Maria had stood dazed, unable to comprehend what had happened. It was at once too horrible, too commonplace, and too sudden for her mind to grasp the facts, even after she was pinioned as Fanny had been, and was brought before *El Retribudór*.

It was not until the chief himself, from force of habit apparently, slipped an arm around her waist that she was roused to a sense of her position. She fought then, striking out at him with the bottle that she held. He knocked it from her grasp with a careless flip of his disengaged hand. It fell upon the lawn, unbroken. His arm held her as powerless as though she were in the grip of a gorilla. So she ceased her useless struggle and stood trembling.

"Who is the housekeeper here?" he demanded.

"I am," she answered.

"Then fetch wine, meat, and bread."

"We have not enough bread," said she.

"Not enough, that is, unless the new bread is done. It is in the oven now, or should be."

"Where is that oven? Lead us to it," he commanded; and Maria, perforce, obeyed.

They went together, of course, to the bake-house. The oven stood outside, between the bake-house and cottage, a huge, conical affair of clay, nearly ten feet in diameter, that baked bread for all the works.

The bread was not done, and for some time it could not be; only one glance was needed in order to grasp that fact. The uncooked loaves, each on its fragment of palm-leaf, were ranged on shelves ready for baking. The oven, which, like all primitive ovens, operated by means of radiated heat stored within its own thick walls, had just been heated. The baker, an Indian, hunch-backed, wizened, and old, had opened the oven door, and was about to draw the fire, which had burned itself to coals. Snarling a savage oath, *El Retribudór* caught one of the old man's legs, tipped him into the oven, and slammed the iron door.

From within there rose an appalling shriek, a prolonged wail of terror that became weaker in sobbing pulsations until it ceased forever. A shriek that set the women cowering in their houses to telling their beads with fervent haste as they prayed for protection; that turned Maria, half Indian though she was, sick and faint with horror, so that she would have fallen had it not been for *El Retribudór's* supporting arm. It brought Pablo, wounded though he was, running from the house toward Maria, whom he saw in *El Retribudór's* arms.

The chief bandit wasted no time nor trouble upon Pablo; a man who was wounded and weaponless was not worth it; and, besides, he was bent only upon his food and rest. Therefore in a manner so casual that it was almost absent-minded, he merely stunned Pablo with a blow from the heavy barrel of his Colt, and trod heavily upon his face as he lay senseless. Then,

giving Maria an admonitory shake, he released her.

"Go fetch wine and such food as can be brought quickly," he ordered her. "Bring the wine first. Take it to the house; we will be there. Make haste!"

She went, walking lightly as usual. The attack upon the man she loved seemed to have driven all fear and horror from her mind, leaving in their place a hatred and a lust for revenge so fierce that it almost burned her. On her way she caught sight of the bottle that had been knocked from her hand. She picked it up, concealed it in the bosom of her frock, and passed on into the laboratory.

She had to go through the laboratory in order to reach the room where the wine was stored; a precaution that had been taken against possible thievery. Maria knew but little about the chemicals in that laboratory, but against certain ones she had been especially cautioned. Notably against that in a big glass jar that held a coarse, white powder, smelling like peaches, and a bottle containing a brown liquid. Maria took them both. The jar's contents she distributed equally in three huge demijohns of native wine; the bottle was emptied into a fourth demijohn. Then she returned to the house, taking the demijohns with her.

In the big, lower room of the house Maria found *El Retribudór's* men, who cursed her for loitering, but accepted the three demijohns she left with them, and allowed her to pass, unhindered, on to their chief, bearing the fourth demijohn.

El Retribudór was seated on the veranda, near the breakfast-table, which still remained as the two young men had left it. Maria brought a large glass—a "seidl"—and, setting it on the veranda-rail, filled it. *El Retribudór* looked at her with suspicion.

"Fill another glass and drink it yourself," he ordered.

There was no other glass at hand, but Hazard's coffee-cup stood on the table, and its contents were almost untouched; but this latter fact was something that *El Retribudór* did not know. Maria poured wine into the cup, filling it to the brim. The bandit chief then could see the liquid. He nodded, and Maria drained the cup. Then he

emptied his glass, held it out to be refilled, and emptied it again.

"It is not good wine," he complained drowsily. "It has a peculiar taste. It tastes of—" he frowned and closed his eyes, as he tried to remember what the taste was like.

The girl crept nearer. *El Retribudór* had laid his pistol on that conveniently broad veranda-rail. She stealthily brushed it off, so that it fell noiselessly upon the lawn. Drawing the bottle from her breast, she uncorked it while creeping closer still. Heaven alone knows whether or not she really would have dropped that acid into his eyes; Indian blood is ruthless, and a woman who avenges an injury to the man she loves is more ruthless still. But be that as it may, she acted too soon.

"I have it; it tastes of opium!" the chief bandit suddenly cried; and his eyes opened as he spoke. They fell upon the girl's face, and what he saw there brought him to his feet. Into his face Maria dashed the open bottle, leaped the veranda-rail, landed running, and fled. He followed, roaring for his men. None answered him.

El Retribudór did not long continue his pursuit. He seemed to lose sight of his quarry. He staggered drunkenly; and as the opium got its hold on her as well, Maria stopped and watched him apathetically as she struggled to keep awake. She saw him collide with a tree and then reel forward to fall, face downward, upon Miss Fanny's ballista. His weight jarred the trigger loose. The stiff palms sprang upright like steel springs to be stopped, half-way by the check rope, which twanged like a plucked harp-string.

That twang—the characteristic sound which denoted that his beloved invention was in action—did what in all probability no other sound in the world could have accomplished. Reaching Miss Fanny's ears as he lay there, blood-sodden and inert, it reached his brain. It was the only thing he could remember, subsequent to the infliction of his wound, for many weary weeks. Ever afterward he insisted that it recalled him from death, which was in the very act of claiming him for its own, and that it worked a miracle in order to do so.

If so, it was, however, a miracle without witnesses, for two reasons: First, because Fanny himself gave no sign, and, secondly, because, even if he had given one, there was no one to see it: For *El Retribudór* was no longer among those present, and Maria, as the opium fumes mounted more and more strongly to her brain, her eyes were elsewhere; in fact, upon *El Retribudór*.

To Maria's clouded mind there was nothing extraordinary in the sight of a large and heavy man like *El Retribudór* soaring through the air. Anyway, he was soaring away from her, and that was all she cared for. So, ceasing to resist the increasing drowsiness, she curled up on the lawn and fell asleep like a contented kitten.

There were no opium fumes in Billy Hazard's brain, but there was a great weakness all over him, for much blood had leaked away from his body, and inch by inch, half conscious and half delirious most of the time, he had crossed that hill and more than half of the valley. He saw what looked like a huge starfish flying toward him, showing in silhouette against the sky, and thought he was delirious still. Several smaller objects accompanied the spraddling thing as it flew. They really were those extemporized chemical shells with which the ballista had been loaded, but they reminded Billy of bluejays chasing some new and ungainly kind of hawk.

They fell together, *El Retribudór* and all—into a little wrinkle of the valley. That wrinkle was presently filled to the brim with the yellow-green fumes of chlorine gas, while its acrid odor reached even to the place where Billy crawled on all fours, like a starved dog. Sight and smell were too much for him. He fainted.

Billy woke in his own bed, with the sting of a hypodermic-needle in his arm, and one of the company doctors bending over him. He would have spoken, but the doctor forestalled him.

"Don't talk," ordered the medico. "Fanny got his head broke badly, so that maybe a little sense will leak into it; but he'll come through, all right. The works are going on like a breeze, and have been for days. That bandit chief is exceedingly dead, and so are most of his gang. The part that came here got hold of some potassium cyanide, and—"

"Pablo? Maria?" asked Billy in a weak voice.

"Going to get married as per schedule, without even waiting for Pablo's arm to knit. Now shut up and go to sleep. I'm off!"

The doctor left. It must have been potent stuff which that hypodermic-needle had injected into Billy's arm; for he sighed a contented little sigh, and, as Maria had done, fell contentedly asleep.

THE KING AND THE POET

THE king rode down the great highway,
His belted knights at his side.
His kingdom was mad with joy that day,
For he rode to meet his bride!

But he heard not the cheers that rent the air,
For he dreamed of the red, red mouth,
The deep, dark eyes, and the dusky hair
Of the flower-girl from the south.

A poet stood near the castle gate;
In his throat the song had died,
And he saw not the king who rode in state,
Nor the flower-girl at his side;

For he dreamed of a face so pure, so white,
Of hair with a golden sheen,
Of the clear, gray eyes, with their steadfast light,
Of her who would soon be queen!

Nell Collins Barden.

It's Folly to be Wise

by George L. Catton



THE little old lady was Tony Lewis's first customer. Tony Lewis had just opened up a real-estate office. The little old lady was Tony's last customer. Tony just closed up his real-estate office. And in between was the Answer.

The Western Land Boom was at its giddy height. The new transcontinental railroad was going through, and it was, according to the cronically and criminally optimistic of the sensation-hunters of the daily press, going to make the fortunes of those who, in the new country it would tap, owned land adjacent to the line-of-steel.

And every real-estate dealer in the Dominion with a gross-grain in his business ethics was building town sites on paper and framing verb-and-adjective hoop-nets for the resulting unprecedented harvest of suckers.

Which wouldn't have been so bad maybe had the graft been confined to those land-sharks already established. But it wasn't. A real-estate dealer's license cost twenty-five dollars, business tax ten; and safe-crackers, porch-climbers, dips—every brand of crook who could raise the price, was buying up every last rock and brush-pile along the surveyed railroad right-of-way and going into a legitimate business. It was too—too easy!

Tony Lewis was one of them. Tony was a con-man. That is, Tony carried confederate money and "mother's wedding-ring" (two dollars and eighty cents a gross, whole-

sale), looking for "the long-haired tribes" and the "sentimental ginks" from "away back in the jungles." But when he "got wise" to the possibilities of Western land, he put on a clean collar. For, as he put it:

"What's the use of plugging at one branch of a business, and dodging the dicks, when there's another branch of the same business licensed by the government, and under police protection?"

And Tony might have made good in the real-estate business. He was a smooth talker, smiled one of those innocent, sympathetic smiles so necessary in confidence games, and had made a thorough, if not profound, study of foolish human nature. Or, in other words, he was peculiarly fitted to grace the come-along desk in a land-shark's office. And he might have amassed a good sized fortune, if—

If the little old lady hadn't bought lots.

Tony had a hard tussle to get established in office. The first month's office rent, the pay-down instalment on the office equipment, and the business tax and license faded out his own small stake; and not belonging in a class that believes in lending money, even if they have it, on "sure things," he couldn't borrow what he needed. An exhaustive canvass of every one he knew netted him but one thousand dollars. He had to have five. He advertised.

The piece of land Tony wanted for a paper town-site was owned by a hard-headed old-timer, who wouldn't take a cent

less for it than five thousand dollars. What was more of it, he must have it cash down, no checks, right smack in his fist—every darned nickel of it!

"No; it wasn't really worth it," he admitted that with a chuckle; "not for farming or anything like that. It wasn't nothing but rocks and a smattering of trees. But to a real-estate dealer, now; let's see. It ought to be worth what? Say, a hundred thousand."

And, yes; Tony could have an option on it for a week for a hundred dollars. But he wouldn't hold it any longer than that one week. Mind that, now! There were several other land-sharks after it, and—

Tony's advertisement, one of those sticksful of carefully worded "Partner with five thousand dollars to invest in a big paying business," brought one answer. The week's option on the town-site had just two days longer to run when that answer was received.

"A sport," that answer was, one of those drooping cigarette, you-can't-put-anything-over-on-me, twenty-year-an-infantile conscientious objector to toil. Tony knew the type. And in his knowledge of human nature Tony didn't beat around the bush. The type before him would relish the proposition better if it savored of something doing that just edged—no more than just edged—the edge of the law.

"This is one of those sure-thing operations on suckers," Tony whispered confidentially. "I've got an option on two hundred acres of land along the new transcontinental railroad that we can get for five thousand dollars. We'll clear the purchase price on the first hundred lots we sell, and then there'll be nine hundred lots at fifty dollars a lot clear profit for us."

The Answer drew down one eye in an "I'm wise" wink, and laid his cigarette on the edge of the desk.

"Listens good to muh," he grinned. "What would I get out of it?"

"Fifty-fifty on this proposition, and twenty-five per cent on all others." Tony didn't even hesitate.

The option expired in two days, and his advertisement had brought but the one answer. Tony unrolled the owner's map of

the "town-site" and went into exhaustive details.

He explained the Western land situation. He told how the newspapers had, with their black-faced optimistic imaginations, paved the way for one of the biggest land swindles in the history of that game, and of other land-sharks right there on the same street who were making thousands of dollars a week.

He wore the subject to a frazzle. And when he was through he had landed the Answer. He wanted, just had to have, five thousand dollars, and the Answer promised:

"I'll get it. It's—it's tied up right at this minute, but I can get it in—in, say, two days. Let's see, this is Tuesday. Say, Thursday. I'll be right here with it by four o'clock on Thursday afternoon. Will that do?"

Tony pondered a moment. His option expired at five o'clock on Thursday afternoon, and that meant that he would have but an hour's grace. But, it was only a block down to the hotel where the owner of the land was stopping, and he could walk that, barring accidents, in five minutes. He nodded his head.

"You'll be here at four o'clock sharp?" he demanded.

"Sure!" The Answer was very emphatic and sincere.

The Answer's clothes were good clothes. He flashed a watch, a good watch, a watch that must have cost a hundred and a half. He smoked expensive cigarettes. His hands showed no sign of manual labor. And he was Tony's only hope.

So Tony went ahead with the game. A gambler in his mean little soul, he spent his last dollars for a lot of carefully worded advertising literature and a map. He even went so far as to have the location of his town-site on that map moved over a mile—to lie right up against the new railroad—and divided up into lots. Then he filled his office window full of advertising and waited for the result.

Came Thursday. Thursday morning the Answer dropped into Tony's office to assure "his partner" that everything was progressing very favorably and that he would, without fail, be in with the five thousand and

four o'clock sharp. At noon Tony telephoned the owner of the town-site that he would, without fail, be there at the hotel in plenty of time to exercise his option on that two hundred acres. At two thirty in the afternoon the first customer came into the office.

Tony didn't believe in losing any time. He was so sure that the Answer would be in with the money that he would have sold, if he could, the whole two hundred acres. He opened up for business at noon.

At two thirty the little old lady closed the office door behind her.

She was a little old lady, not just a little old woman. She was short and small and rather thin and worn, and her neat black hair was plentifully toned with silver threads. Her face was wrinkled, smilingly wrinkled, and her eyes still held that trusting-everybody, faith-in-her-fellowmen light that had been innocence in her girlhood.

She was just a little old lady; and one of those who, in the simple depths of their honesty, confide in everybody.

Tony watched her reading his advertising in the window and had her appraised before she came in. He gave her his most stately bow when he answered her first question.

"Yes, madam, we have. We have the very choicest location in all the West today. Here"—he waved his hand over the big map on the wall—"is a map of our location; and, as you can see, the new railroad right-of-way is its northern boundary. Over here, about three miles to the west, begins the edge of the great wheat-belt, and there has been a discovery of lignite—brown coal—made just there. A big manufacturing concern is now negotiating with us for a factory-site here; we'll likely close the deal to-night, and here—"

Tony spent a full twenty minutes in an elaborate imaginary exposition of the wonderful future of his town-site. And when he was through, when the little old lady opened her hand-bag, he realized that he might have saved himself half of his talk. For the little old lady, like hundreds of others of her "easy" type, had been caught by the daily press even before she stopped at his window to read his advertisements.

"I've been thinking a long while about

it," the little old lady confided. "Horace Greeley, wasn't it, who said: 'Go West'? And land, especially land one can build a home on, is always a good investment, isn't it?"

Tony assured her most emphatically that it was.

"So I guess I'll take"—she paused. Then, thoughtfully: "How much are those lots worth?"

Tony caught a glance of a check-book in her hand-bag, and doubled the highest of his intended prices.

"The price per lot in this division," his pointing forefinger cut off the top half of the town-site, "is one hundred and fifty dollars. But if you take more than one lot—I'll tell you what I'll do. You're the first buyer on this location, so I'll give you lots in that division, if you take more than one, for one hundred dollars each."

The little old lady smiled.

"My!" she laughed. "That Western land is cheap, isn't it? I had made up my mind to spend three thousand dollars on my home-site, and I imagined I would be able to get four or five lots for that. And now, why, I can have thirty lots, can't I? Do you know, I think I'll take"—she hesitated, studying the map. Then she pointed to the corner the farthest away from the railroad. "Can I get thirty lots all together right there?"

Tony very nearly gasped. He had figured on easy money in the real-estate graft, but not this easy. Why, here his first customer was taking enough lots to more than half pay for the whole two hundred acres! He caught himself just in time. He frowned to hide his confusion, and resorted to subterfuge.

"It's rather irregular, so many lots all together," he drawled slowly, apparently doubtful. "But"—his face brightened noticeably—"I'll do it. You're my first buyer on this location. Here's a pencil. Outline on the map just the block of thirty lots that you would like."

Then when the little old lady had outlined the block she wanted she reached for her check-book.

"Now, if you will give me a pen," she suggested.

Tony frowned in earnest then. He suddenly found himself "up a tree," as he mentally put it. He couldn't get the check without returning for it the deed to the lots, and he couldn't get the deed to the lots till he had the deed to the land. And he couldn't get the deed to the land till five o'clock. He looked longingly at the check-book, and association of ideas brought a solution to the problem. He glanced up at the clock.

"The banks are closed," he smiled. "We can't get at our safety deposit box for the deeds of those lots till to-morrow morning at ten. So, if you will just give me your address, we'll send up your deeds to-morrow morning and you can pay for them then. Will that be satisfactory?"

The little old lady said that it would, quite satisfactory. That was, if he would guarantee that she would get the desired lots. And having received that assurance the little old lady, without another word, left the room and closed the office door behind her.

Then when she was gone Tony held up at arm's-length her card and threw imaginary kisses at it. At four o'clock the Answer would be in with the five thousand dollars. At five o'clock he would own the deed to his town-site. The next morning he would take the deed of the two hundred acres to a lawyer and have it broken up into lot deeds and send the little old lady hers. Things looked rosy. He glanced up at the clock.

It was three o'clock. In one hour the Answer would be there—but, suppose he wasn't?

Tony sat down at his desk and waited

patiently. It all depended now on the Answer. If the Answer came with the five thousand he stood to make the first real money he had ever made. If the Answer didn't come his back was to the wall. He didn't have a nickel.

The telephone rang. At three forty-five the Answer called Tony up.

"Is this Mr. Lewis?" the Answer demanded. .

Tony said that it was.

"Say, Mr. Lewis," the Answer barked, "I think we'll have to call that deal off. I can't—"

Tony interrupted. Tony saw everything going to pieces in one smash. He wouldn't be able to use his option after five o'clock, and other real-estate dealers were after that two hundred acres. He couldn't borrow another nickel to save his life. The second month's office rent was due on the following Monday morning and he couldn't even meet that!

"Say!" he roared. "What kind of a stunt are you trying to pull off on me, anyhow? What in—"

The Answer interrupted.

"Hey!" he barked. "Who are you yelling at? Listen, I was getting the money from another party, and I'd have got it, too. But—listen, Lewis. I was getting the money from my mother. She had it. But now she hasn't. This afternoon she went down-town, and one of you real-estate sharks stung her for thirty lots, three thousand dollars' worth of that damn Western land!"

And he slammed on the receiver.

And the little old lady is still wondering why she didn't get her lots.

TO CLORINDA

SHE walks like Luna, in the night,
And fills the earth with golden gladness,
And all my evil thoughts take flight,
And all my ills, and all my sadness.

One breath of hers upon the air
Makes all the earth as sweet as roses,
But when she frowns—gallants, beware—
The poetry you read all prose is.

Tom Hall,



The Log-Book

By the Editor

THE Log is a free parliament, and every man has a right to defend himself, so I cheerfully make space for the following letter from Mr. Jenks in reference to a criticism of his novelette which appeared in THE ARGOSY for September 20:

Owasco, New York.

In the "Log-Book," in THE ARGOSY of November 22, I see a man who says he is a Butte miner takes exception to my statement that a coal mine in western Pennsylvania may be only 180 feet deep. The Montana man waxes patronizingly funny over my supposed mistake. As a matter of fact, I was very careful in writing "The Hoodoo Mine" to get the depth of the mine right. I consulted not only one, but several, coal-miners, timekeepers, and foremen, as well as actual diggers, and found that 180 feet was a fair average of depth, although there are mines deeper in that region. Moreover, I lived in western Pennsylvania for more than sixteen years, and, as a newspaperman, had many opportunities to visit coal mines and observe their working.

On one occasion I spent two weeks consecutively in a small village on the Monongahela River, where there had been a bad accident, and attended the proceedings of an "investigation" day after day, to report them for my paper, the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*. That mine had no depth at all—it was driven straight into the side of a hill, as many of them are in that district. Everywhere there the coal lies near the surface.

This Montana man is probably talking about copper mines, with their more than 4,000 feet of depth. I do not think that, even in the centuries-old mines of Europe, a depth of 4,000 feet has been attained anywhere, and I doubt whether coal is worked at that depth even in this country.

I wouldn't have taken the trouble to notice this wild man from Montana, only that I should not like you to think I am careless in my facts when writing for you. I have still rather a wide acquaintance in western Pennsylvania, and it has come to me several times, and always indirectly, that "The Hoodoo Mine" has made a decided hit in the mining country, largely because it presents an accurate picture of mining operations and the daily life of the people.

I have nothing to say if one of my stories is called rotten, but when it is charged that I am negligent—and by a man who evidently does not know what he is talking about—I feel that I am entitled to a mild protest.

I remain, sincerely yours,

GEORGE C. JENKS.



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in which *Jack Cavanaugh*, ex-devil-dog, met a queen who was not a queen; a mountain that was not really a mountain, and a few other little mysteries, which not even the Morse code was capable of solving. And as for the Gray Girl—to know her was to love her, as you'll agree when you have finished this sparkling novelette, which is published complete in THE ARGOSY for February 14.



You will find several surprises in the course of "A VOICE IN THE DARK," by William Merriam Rouse. I know I did when I read it, and as surprise is almost three-fourths of the pleasure to be derived from fiction, I feel that I need not say

more to put you on the alert for this short story in our next week's budget, which will also contain a very unique tale of the railroad in "Wolcott LeClair Beard's" "PHANTOM DANGER." And don't overlook "THE BOMBERS," by Samuel G. Camp, in which *Al* relates in his inimitable fashion what happened when he and *Doc* undertook to expose *Mme. Lopokova*.

DOESN'T DARE MISS BRINGING AN ARGOSY HOME

Lobdell, New York.

Say, talk about *THE ARGOSY*, if I did not bring it in four times a month, the missus would make me go supperless to bed, and I don't think I'd eat any breakfast Sunday morning. "Drag Harlan" is one of Seltzer's best, and I have read *THE ARGOSY* fifteen or twenty years or more. Yours for the best.

W. L. COLLINS.

P. S.—Say, I don't care what you do with this, but it is so, for wife o' mine just said it again.

ENJOYS READING ABOUT FAMILIAR TERRITORY

Tampico, Mexico.

I have been a reader of your magazine for a long time, and I have passed many a pleasant hour reading the good stories therein. Keep up your good work, but don't ever cut out the serials. I care more for stories about the Canadian north-west and U. S. Western ones, as I have been clear to the north end of Hudson Bay. There was one that interested me very much (about Custer's last battle) as I rode range over that country, and was also a government scout during the Pine Ridge uprising, so you see I am a judge of Western stories. We get your magazine here pretty regularly, with an advance of only five cents per copy.

Let all the knockers play ostrich for a while, and you run *THE ARGOSY* on the same plan as you have been. I have always found that a *knock* is a *boost*.

F. C. WALKER.

"REAL STORIES WITH REAL ENDINGS"

Canton, Illinois.

Since a trouble that made the coal situation and the sugar shortage take a back seat in the minds of *THE ARGOSY* readers, I find that a previous effort of mine went to help fill the waste-basket. That's by way of a knock, I guess, so here's for another try.

I've read "Brain and Brawn," by Frederick, and if it had been by any other author I might have called it good, but I am still prejudiced over that "Luck" thing. Honest, that was a rotten story, and I'm half in the notion that it is responsible for putting the jinx on *THE ARGOSY*.

Listen; if you have anything more like "The Single Track" or "Beau Rand" lying away on the shelf, why, you can't print 'em any too soon to suit me. They were real stories with real endings. You see I read for pleasure, and I believe there are enough bum endings in real life without reminding us about 'em through our stories.

But "Towsee Mongalay" was the greatest little short story I have read in many a day. Did you say it had a sad ending? Sure; but it didn't hit you so unexpected like.

Come on, and print this. The waste-basket's full, and two or three easy-satisfied readers are boosting "Luck," that beauty apple with the rotten core.

C. H. M.

ARGOSY POPULAR IN TENNESSEE

Nashville, Tennessee.

I have never seen a letter in your Log-Book from this city, or even this State, so I am coming at you with one. This does not mean there are not any *Argosy* readers in Nashville, for the day the book gets here the news-stands have oodles of 'em, but two days later you can hardly find one in town. But I guess you know the big sale Nashville has. But, say, how about some old mountaineer stories? I like them fine, and so do a lot of other *Argosy* readers I know. That "Lye-Ball" was great stuff in my sort of story. But I like Western and short stories, too.

As far as the serials are concerned, I can't say I like 'em, but of course I am not the only reader, so I won't kick. But another thing: why not shoot the guy who said the book came too often? To tell the truth, I have not been reading *THE ARGOSY* for more than a month, but I have been buying it every week for the folks at home. Then I was injured in an auto accident and confined to my room. When I asked for something to read they gave me a "gob" of *THE ARGOSY*, which I read until I came to the Log-Book, so I knew it was my duty to write, too, as no one else from Nashville seems to have the energy.

J. L. HENDERSON.

P. S.—Try and see if you can't scare up some mountaineer stories soon; I am sure hankering for one.

FAVORITES AMONG THE SERIALS, NOVELETES AND SHORTS

Montour Falls, New York.

Have been a reader of *THE ARGOSY* since the *Railroad Man's Magazine* and *THE ARGOSY* were combined, and a reader of the former the last four years it was published. I am very fond of *THE ARGOSY*, but miss the *Railroad Man's Magazine* very much, and wish we might have more engineering stories like "David Vallory," and "The Single Track."

Among other serials I liked in *THE ARGOSY* are the two just mentioned and "No Questions Asked," "The Ship That Crumbled," "Thumbs Down," "Mrs. McPhee's Trespasser," and "Everything but the Truth."

The novelettes I liked best were: "Troopers Unafraid," "Yellow Elephants," "Not Under Control," "The House in Silver Street," "Whose Hands?" "The First National Bank of Faro," and "Alone in Boston."

Such shorts as "A Night's Work," "Mustered

Out," "Spaghetti," "This Is the End," "A Night Off," "Paradise Bossed," "Eight Terrible Hours," "Right Back at You," "The Gentleman," "Women and Guns," and "Reno Ruth and Naomi" gave me many pleasant minutes.

Here's hoping you'll never run out of this kind.
P. R. MACKEY.

HIS CONSTANT BUDDY

Houston, Texas.

This is my first attempt to write you. I have been a reader of *THE ARGOSY* for the past ten or twelve years and I have enjoyed it very much. I have read hundreds of good stories during that time.

During my two years' service with the United States Marines in the world war *THE ARGOSY* was my constant buddy and it helped me pass away many an hour that would otherwise have been dull ones for me. I enjoyed it during that time more than I ever had before and I can't express my appreciation in words for a magazine like *THE ARGOSY*. In my estimation it can't be beat.

Since my discharge from the U. S. Marines I have read a number of good stories, but the three I liked best were "Square Deal Sanderson," "Beau Rand" and "Everything but the Truth." They were great, and in my opinion they will be hard to beat. I am looking forward to some more stories like the above. Would like to see a story of the Northwest, which is God's country.
DUKE A. YORK.

From all over the country, and from France as well, I have received letters expressive of the help given to our boys by the relaxation derived from reading *THE ARGOSY*. In one case, as you will note, a copy of the magazine was handed to a man in hospital by no less distinguished a personage than the Prince of Wales.

A FINE TRIBUTE FROM A LAWYER

New York City.

After a hard day spent in court I often find rest and relaxation in reading the bright, entertaining and virile stories published in your magazine.

There is one writer on your staff who particularly excels in stories relating to the law-courts, and who seems to have a trained legal mind. No practising lawyer or graduate in law could be more accurate in stating legal facts and conclusions. I refer to Edwina Levin, who seems to run to stories involving intricate legal problems, and who is always absolutely correct in relation to these subjects.

Contrary to most writers, there is never a doubt as to her familiarity with "the law of the case" when visualizing a court-room scene. She seems thoroughly familiar with the forms of legal procedure and brings out the dramatic points of a trial without committing the customary errors of the ordinary lay-writer.

There are few writers of fiction who can write a law story without making some palpable mistake which is readily apparent to a lawyer. The story recently published in your magazine, entitled "The Man Who Met Himself," by Edwina Levin, dealing with intricately involved legal matters, is a good example of her wonderful ability in this line

of fiction. The story was correct in all technical details, and the court-room proceedings were accurately described. I considered it one of the most fascinating and thrilling tales I ever read.

SAMUEL H. WANDELL.

CUSS WORDS AND RED HEADS

Morrisville, Missouri.

Have been reading *THE ARGOSY* ever since January, 1919. That hasn't been long, but has been long enough for me to find out it is the best magazine going. We have always read monthly and weekly papers, but since we have been getting *THE ARGOSY* we never look at them any more.

THE ARGOSY ought to come twice a week and have more pages in it. I can't praise it enough. It is certainly a fine magazine. The serials I liked best were "Cold Steel," "The Duke of Chimney Butte," "Forbidden Trails," and "Beau Rand." Seltzer's stories are fine. Am looking forward eagerly to "Drag Harlan." I enjoyed John Frederick's "Luck" very much. I like to read about red-headed people, for I just escaped being red-headed.

The novelette, "The Exodus of Bull Milligan" was fine, and all the short stories are good. I haven't found a bad story in *THE ARGOSY*. I enjoyed Elmer Johnson's letter about the girls powdering their noses. I think he's a little bit too hard on them. No girl wants a shiny nose. Let them camouflage a little if they want to.

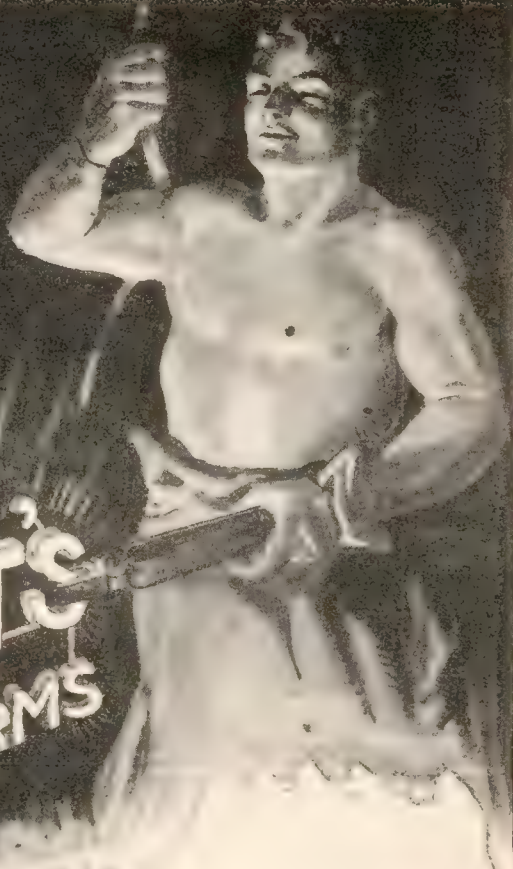
Have noticed some don't like cuss words in stories, but Western stories are not real Western stories without them.
FERN STOKES.

LOG-BOOK JOTTINGS

Dan Henderson, Fishtail, Montana, who liked "Between Worlds," thinks the best story ever published in *THE ARGOSY* was "After a Million Years," by the same author. Philomela H. McIntyre, Bridgeton, New Jersey, claims it would take a book to tell all about the fine stories we give our readers. She instances especially "The Red Road," and "Marching Sands." Mary McHugh, Orange, New Jersey, thinks *THE ARGOSY* serials are wonderful, especially "Beau Rand," "Thumbs Down," and "Luck," and among the short stories instances particularly "Terrible Twenty," by Thomas Addison. Dayne Mahnkin, Twin Falls, Idaho, has been a reader of *THE ARGOSY* for ten years, and enjoys the Log-Book as much as the rest of the magazine, the whole of which provides hours of enjoyment. Cashes H. Mattox, Zanesville, Ohio, likes Western stories best, such as "Beau Rand," "The Whistling Girl," "Isle of Drums," and "Forbidden Trails." Carl Silvaro, Braddock, Pennsylvania, admits that "Between Worlds" was interesting, but doesn't see where the author got his idea of switching men from one planet to another. A reader of Columbus, Ohio, is requested to brush up his own history, as Edward VII was certainly the grandfather and not the uncle of the present Prince of Wales. James Anargyros, Memphis, Tennessee, who enjoys "The Golden Cat," "Drag Harlan," and "Which of These Two?" is informed that a new serial by Edgar Franklin will start February 21, and one by Seltzer March 13. Doris Kenton, Akron, Ohio, cites "Sunnie of Timberline," "After a Million Years," "Between Worlds," and "The Girl in Khaki" as her favorites.

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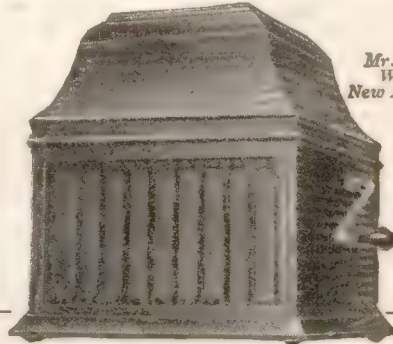
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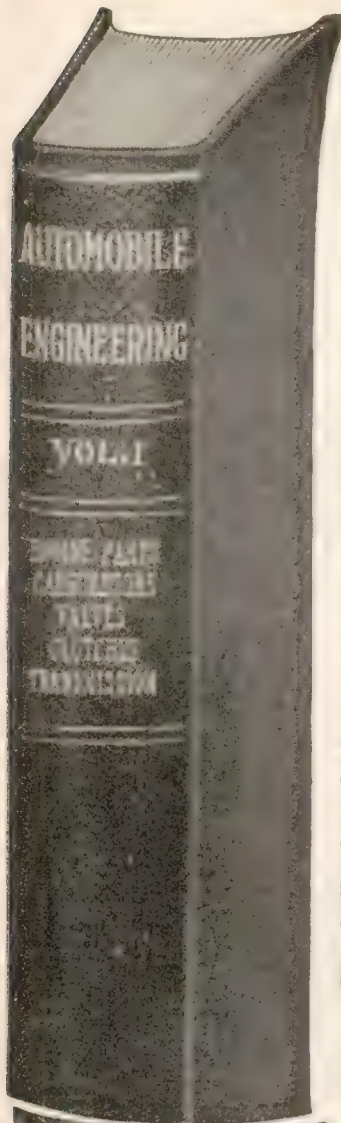
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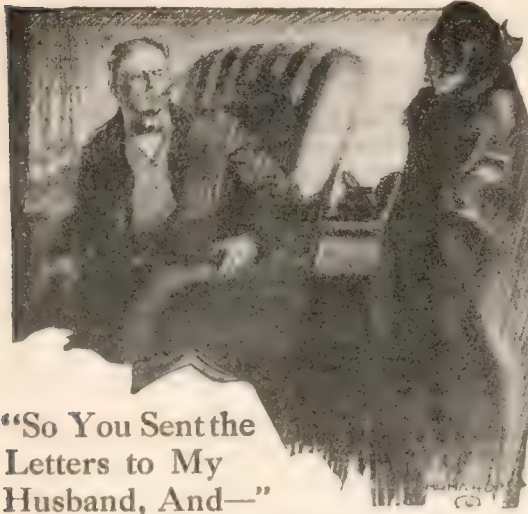
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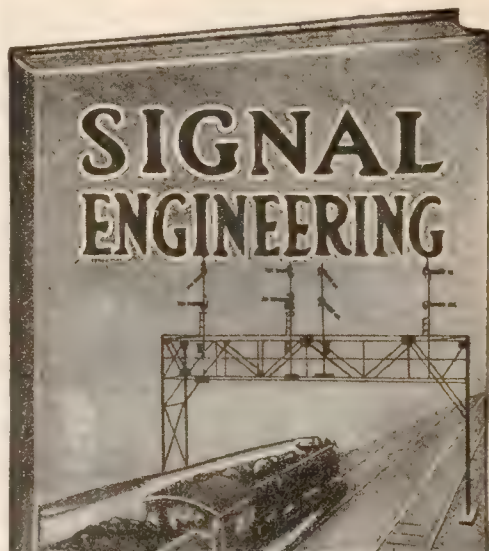
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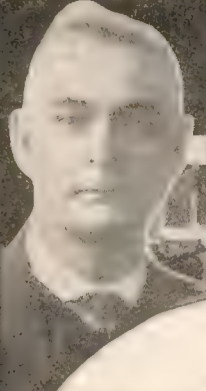
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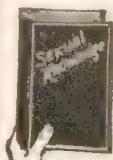
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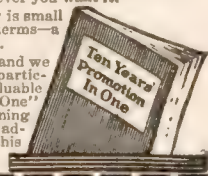
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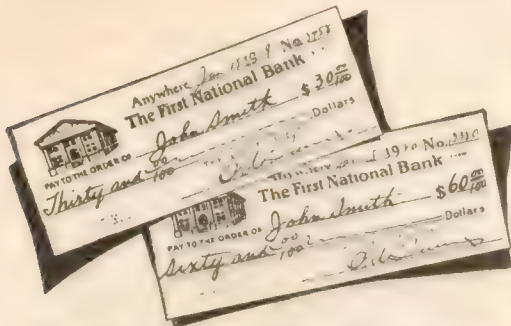
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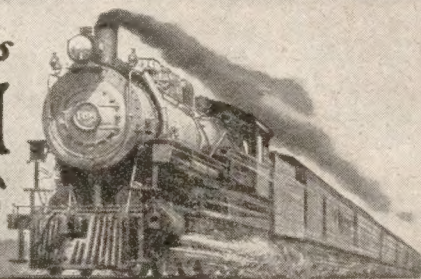
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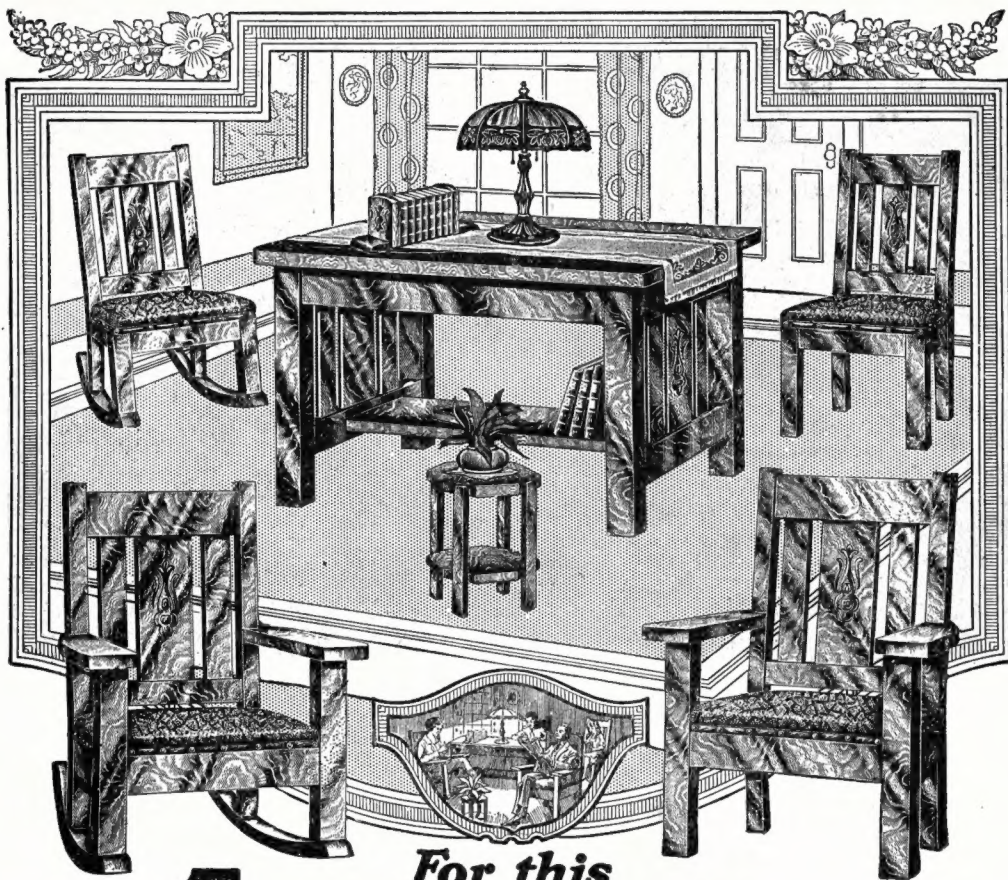
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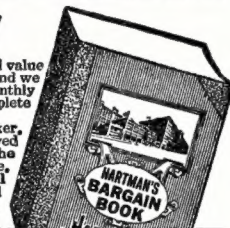
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